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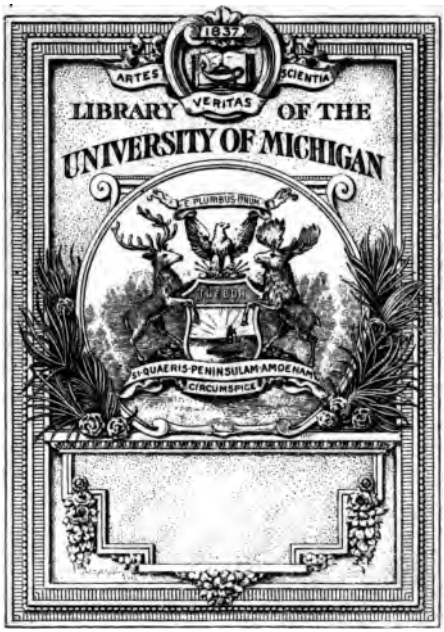
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A

CRITICAL DISSERTATION

ON

TASTE.

By the same Author,

A

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

Into the Source of the

PLEASURES

DERIVED FROM

TRAGIC REPRESENTATIONS.

From which is deduced, the Secret of giving Dramatic Interest to Tragedies intended for Representation. Preceded by a Critical Examination of the various Theories adopted on the Subject by the English, French, and German Philosophers.

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A

Critical Dissertation

ON THE

NATURE AND PRINCIPLES

OF

TASTE.

BY M. M'DERMOT,

AUTHOR OF A LETTER TO THE REV. W. L. BOWLES, IN REPLY TO HIS LETTER TO THOMAS CAMPBELL, ESQ. AND TO HIS TWO LETTERS TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD BYRON, IN VINDICATION OF THEIR DEFENCE OF THE POETICAL CHARACTER OF POPE.

First follow nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light;
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art. *Pope.*

Natura fieret laudabile carmen an arte,
Quæsitum est: ego nunc studium sine divite vena,
Nec rude quid prosit video ingenium, alterius sic
Altera poscit opem res, et conjurat amicè. *Hor.*

London:

PRINTED FOR SHERWOOD, JONES, & CO.

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1823.

TO

THOMAS CAMPBELL, Esq.

As an ardent admirer of that creative art which gives the most expansive scope to the refined perceptions of Taste, and the divine associations of Genius—that art in which you have so eminently excelled, and through which you have not only revived, but redeemed, the native spirit and chaste simplicity, the classic elegance and impassioned enthusiasm, of a more poetic and a happier age,—permit me to acknowledge the honour which I feel conferred upon me, in being permitted to prefix your name to the following work.

MARTIN M'DERMOT.

PREFACE.

WHETHER Taste be an original faculty, or an acquired power of discriminating such qualities in sensible and intellectual being, as produce certain pleasing emotions in the mind, all writers are not agreed; but whether it be original or acquired, we all agree in acknowledging the dignity of its nature, and the extent of its influence. It is conversant with all the objects of animate and inanimate creation, nor are even the unembodied forms of intellectual being placed beyond the expansive range of its dominion—a dominion, however, the precise limits of which seem not as yet distinctly marked out by the critics, though it has been frequently made the subject of critical and philosophical investigation. It is acknowledged, however, to belong only to him who possesses that exquisite discrimination which distinguishes, in all the works of nature, whatever qualities are most pleasing and agreeable to man, and which discerns whether these qualities are

happily combined and contrasted with each other, when transferred from the subjects in which they are originally found to the imitative productions of art. It deduces its principles from the observations which it makes upon, and the maxims which it deduces from, the nature and diversity of the emotions produced by the primary and associated qualities of sensible and intellectual being. Poetry, painting, gardening, and the improvement of real landscape, sculpture, architecture, music, the drama, eloquence, and composition in general, are therefore indebted to it, if not for their origin, at least for their progressive improvement and ultimate perfection. It is therefore unnecessary to enlarge on the importance of the subject; but, as it has already exercised the talent and the intellect of the most refined and critical writers, it may be necessary to say a word relative to the motives that led to the present work.

Beauty and Sublimity have been generally considered the proper objects of taste; but beauty and sublimity are, in themselves, qualities so occult in their nature, that they have hitherto eluded the exploring and detecting acumen of human genius. From all that has been as yet written on the subject, who can pretend to determine in what beauty consists? Of this truth Mr. Dugald Stuart has been so well convinced, that he concludes from it the impossibility

of discovering any common quality in beautiful objects. His "Essay on the Sublime" equally proves its abstractedness, and the difficulty of determining its nature and essence. If, then, sublimity and beauty be the proper objects of taste, and if these objects be involved in doubt and obscurity, it requires no argument to prove, that taste itself—that faculty, as it is called, which professes to discover the beauty and sublimity of the material and intellectual world—partakes, in no inconsiderable degree, of that perplexity and confusion in which its proper objects are as yet enveloped. Hence it follows, that an Inquiry into the nature and principles of Taste is still open to any writer who can either remove a part of this obscurity, or who can lift up the veil at once, and permit us to view it in its naked and original simplicity. If the reader, therefore, should find, that he has a more correct view of its true nature and office after perusing this work, than he has been able to collect from the labours of former writers, he will admit the propriety of the views that have led to its production; and he will equally admit the propriety of a philosophical Inquiry into the nature and distinct character of those qualities which produce the emotions of the Beautiful and the Sublime, notwithstanding all that has been already written on the subject. In this inquiry I am at present engaged,

from a belief, whether well founded or not the public only can ultimately determine, that I have discovered those common qualities which are to be found in all objects that excite the emotions of the sublime and beautiful, and which have been so fruitlessly, though so diligently, sought after by former writers. I have been, however, careful to confine myself, in the present work, to the consideration of Taste alone, without any regard to the theory which I intend to adopt on the subject of Sublimity and Beauty, and which I expect shortly to submit to that tribunal from whose judgment there can be no ultimate appeal.

As the subject has been already discussed by several eminent writers, with many of whose opinions the theory which I have adopted has obliged me to disagree, I thought it proper to state these opinions, to enter into a philosophical investigation of their truth, and to assign the reasons which have led me to dissent from them. This, I think, is a duty which necessarily devolves on every writer who would redeem his subject from popular and philosophical error. Without it the public is not qualified to judge between him and the writers to whom he stands opposed; and different theories may be offered to the public at the same time, each of which may be sufficiently specious to influence the judgment of the critical reader, without leaving him any clue or criterion

by which he can determine between them. This consideration has induced me to investigate the opinions of my predecessors whenever I happened to differ with them; but I have not done so wantonly, or in matters of minor import; nor havè I at any time digressed from my subject, to reply to opinions with which it was not essentially connected. It will, therefore, be found, that whenever I have combated the opinions of other writers to substantiate my own, I have been elucidating the subject in which I was engaged; and whether I have been successful or not, I have led my reader into that line of inquiry which will enable him, in most cases, to determine between us. Had I been guided by a certain false delicacy, I should, perhaps, have been more cautious; but I have always considered this effeminate delicacy the most effectual barrier to the progress of the arts and sciences. He who fears to expose the errors of another when he is acquainted with them, cannot surely possess that independence of mind, without which the most transcendent talents can effect but little in the cause of truth. I am aware that he who attacks the opinions of other writers, even when he demonstrates them to be erroneous, is frequently supposed to do so through the affectation of superior knowledge, or at least through motives less honourable than the disinterested love of truth; but he who fears to

pursue that course which his own judgment points out to him, lest he incur suspicions of which he knows himself to be innocent, will eternally hesitate. He only is qualified to write for posterity, who lifts himself above the influence of all personal considerations, whose sole aim is the discovery of truth, and who wishes to see his own opinions disproved, if it be possible to disprove them. But if he will not excuse an error in himself, neither will he connive at it in another, and therefore he unmasks it wherever he detects it. He appreciates as he ought the counsel of Pope, when he says:

> "Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
> For the worst avarice is that of sense.
> With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust;
> Nor be so civil as to prove unjust:
> Fear not the anger of the wise to raise:
> He best can bear reproof who merits praise."

What has a writer to apprehend from speaking as he thinks? Does he fear that the popularity of other writers will prepossess the public mind against such of his opinions as stand opposed to theirs; and that neither perspicuity of diction, ardour of eloquence, nor even the luminous evidence of demonstration itself, can triumph over the prejudices which guard the dominion of established authority? He who is capable of forming such a judgment, is, in every respect, incapable of

instructing or improving mankind; and it matters little whether he writes as he thinks, or as others think for him. The judgment, philosophy, and experience of an author, who imagines the public can become a party to any writer, and therefore incapable of appreciating his merits, must eternally range within the empalement of a contracted intellect, beyond the twilight precincts of which, truth and nature are equally concealed from his view; and whatever motives induced him to become a writer, his memory is destined to glide into peaceful oblivion and undisturbed repose. He who has truth on his side, and ability to support it, will force his readers to believe in him whether they will or will not, however powerfully they may be warped by antecedent prejudices or favourite systems. No man has free will over his own understanding, when the object of its contemplation is demonstrated and proved; and, therefore, no man can refuse his assent to truth when it is exposed to him in its original and unmasked simplicity, neither involved amid the undistinguishing distinctions of a misguided but ingenious dialectick, nor enveloped in the still-stand gloom of laborious dulness.

When I sent this work to press, it was my intention to publish my Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful along with it, as the greater part of the work was then prepared; but having subsequently

reflected on the difficulties which a writer, unknown to the literary world, must necessarily encounter in his first appearance before the public, I thought it more prudent to publish my "Dissertation on Taste" by itself. This, perhaps, may have, in a few instances, (though I am not now aware of any) determined the mode of expression which I have used in the early part of this work; but if any allusions should be made in it to a second or third volume, the reader will attribute them to this circumstance alone.

I am aware that the learned and critical reader will peruse the first production of a writer with more than ordinary scrutiny, particularly when he finds him commencing his literary career with a Dissertation on the most elegant, and the most undefined of subjects: he will call forth that analyzing acumen which has so frequently enabled him to detect the errors, and, if his sympathy has kept pace with his mental acquirements, to lament the wanderings of fancied genius. But whether he assume the haughty attitude of the censorious, or the milder benignity of the impartial critic, I feel equally tranquil as to the final result. I claim no indulgence for error,—on the contrary I shall feel indebted to any person who sets me right, and I will acknowledge with pleasure the justice of his remarks. As I admit no writer to be infallible, I cannot be vain enough

to claim that privilege to myself which I deny to others. But while I am thus willing to acknowledge and recant whatever erroneous opinions I may have adopted in the present work, whether they be pointed out to me publicly or privately, yet neither public nor private motives will ever induce me to acknowledge myself in error, till I am first convinced of it, and I will always hold myself in readiness "to give an account of the faith that is in me." There is one merit which I may be allowed to claim—that of rendering my meaning, and the opinions which I have laboured to establish, clearly understood. That I have been right at all times is more than I can presume to assert; but, right or wrong, I apprehend my readers will be at no loss to discover the spirit and tenor of my arguments, as I have never sought to throw an importance over them, by that studied ambiguity of expression which affects to dignify style by perplexing the understanding; and which always looks most profoundly wise when it is most perfectly unintelligible.

CONTENTS.

CHAP. I.

On the Nature of Taste, and wherein it differs from Sensibility, or the Emotion that attends the Perception of Beauty 1

CHAP. II.

On Beauty abstractedly considered as an Object of Taste 42

CHAP. III.

On the Standard of Taste 64

CHAP. IV.

On the Taste of particular Ages and Nations; and the Necessity of studying the Ancient Models..... 182

CHAP. V.

On the Influence of Habit in Matters of Taste..... 272

CHAP. VI.

On the Alliance of Taste and Criticism..... 325

CHAP. VII.

Miscellaneous Observations on the proper Objects of Taste 376

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A

CRITICAL DISSERTATION

ON

THE NATURE AND PRINCIPLES

OF

TASTE.

CHAP. I.

On the Nature of Taste, and wherein it differs from Sensibility, or the Emotion that attends the Perception of Beauty.

WHOEVER would make himself acquainted with the original archetypes of beauty that exist in nature, or with the imitative beauties of art, whether presented through the medium of language or of painting, whether they brighten in the inspired page of a Homer or a Milton, or fix the attention of the admiring spectator to the glowing canvass of a Raphael, or an Angelo—whoever would commune with those qualities of mind that irradiate thought, and enrobe sentiment in the light vesture of beauty—must first make himself acquainted with that association or disposition of

qualities in which sensible and intellectual beauty consists. It is this knowledge that constitutes taste; whence it follows, that the extent of our acquaintance with the qualities of beauty always determines the extent of our acquaintance with the principles of taste. A knowledge of the one necessarily implies a knowledge of the other; and when we say it is difficult to define taste, we only acknowledge that it is difficult to tell in what beauty consists. If the qualities of beauty were fixed and invariable, an acquaintance with them would render our ideas of taste as fixed and permanent, nor would it longer be pronounced that volatile and airy faculty which will not endure the chains of a definition, and which stands for a different idea in different minds. Beauty and taste, though they belong to different subjects, cannot be separated: the former belongs to the object perceived; the latter to the percipient. Taste is an acquired power of discriminating those qualities of sensible and intellectual being, which, from the invisible harmony that exists between them and the constitution of our nature, are endowed with the property of exciting in us pleasing and delightful emotions, in degrees proportioned to our natural sensibility, and of distinguishing from them the opposite qualities of ugliness, which excite, in similar degrees, the opposite emotions of aversion and disgust. Beauty,

as it is distinguished from taste, of which it is the proper object, may be defined, that association of qualities in sensible and intellectual being which awakens in us the above emotions of pleasure or delight, and in the discrimination of which taste is conversant. In this definition of beauty, I have considered it only in reference to taste, without any regard to the principle by which the qualities of beauty awaken in us their correspondent emotions. This principle has been anxiously sought after by the most eminent philosophers in England, France, and Germany; and, indeed, an inquiry into the origin of the emotions produced by the sublime and beautiful, in nature and in art, has been a favourite topic with many elegant writers, since the time of Longinus. Professor Stuart, however, in his late work on the subject, tells us, that "the success of their speculations has been so inconsiderable, that little can be inferred from them, but the *impossibility of the problem* to which they have been directed." This sweeping clause, coming from so high an authority, must have considerable influence in deterring others, and, it would seem, should have deterred himself, from attempting the enodation of a problem that admits of no solution. If it be true that no common quality belongs to objects, which entitles them to the name of *beautiful*, it is idle, in the highest degree, to seek for that which has no existence; but if such a quality

be allowed to exist, the fruitless attempts that have been hitherto made to discover it, should not deter the labours of others, nor check that spirit of inquiry which seeks to trace the original form and features of things through all the various and diversified aspects in which they present themselves to our view. If we are to be deterred by the ill success of others, what becomes of that

> Emulation, whose keen eye
> Forward still and forward strains,
> Nothing ever deeming high
> While a higher hope remains?

A belief that this common quality has a real existence in the nature of things, that it connects all the other qualities of beauty, and that the term beautiful is applied to no object in which its connecting power does not prevail, has alone induced me to engage in the present inquiry; but, as I confine myself entirely, at present, to the investigation of those mental energies, and mediums of sensible perception, that are necessarily exercised in the cultivation of taste, the subject of beauty will necessarily belong to the second part of this work.

It is of the first importance to set out with a just view of our subject, as a leading error is generally the cause of all our false theories, in morals, in philosophy, and in religion. A leading,

fundamental error, must necessarily affect all the subdivisions of the theory that arise from it, as they must owe their truth or falsehood to the principle from which they arise, and on which they are founded. It will not, therefore, be amiss, that I should first make some observations on the opinion which former writers seem to have entertained of Taste, as these observations will not only give us a more correct idea of its nature and office, but they will afford us an opportunity of perceiving the process by which it is cultivated. They will also shew, that the erroneous definitions of taste which have been adopted by former writers, have, unavoidably, led them into many inconsistencies on the subject.

Dr. Blair, in his Essay on Taste, defines it to be "a power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art;" a definition which seems to be borrowed from the following passage in Akenside:—

> What, then, is taste but those internal powers,
> Active and strong, and feelingly alive
> To each fine impulse?

According to this definition, which makes taste consist, not in a knowledge or perception of the qualities of beauty in an object, but in a passive faculty of being pleased at their presence, it is possible to have a perfect knowledge of beauty

without any taste; and the best connoisseur can have no pretensions to it, unless he feel a sensible pleasure whenever he perceives the beauties of a picture, a bust, or a statue. But this is not all: a man may have an excellent taste in the morning, and have none at night. We will suppose that a French connoisseur takes his friend to the Louvre, to shew him all the beauties of art that are there deposited. He dwells with rapture on the comprehensive genius of Da Vinci, the sublime conceptions of Angelo, the refined taste of Raphael, the might and energy of the allegoric Rubens, the art of Corregio, the tenderness and delicacy of Titian, the expression of Dominico, the airs of Guido, and the carnations of Giorgion. In a word, he seems himself to be possessed with the spirit of these mighty masters, and to glow with the bright and inspiring ardour of their creative genius,

> "————*ce feu, cette divine flamme,*
> *L'esprit de notre esprit, & l'ame de notre ame.*"

He returns, at length, with his friend, exhausted with exertion, and surfeited with intellectual delight. On his return home he meets with another friend, who importunes him, thus fatigued, to return with him to the Louvre. They return. He points out to his friend the same beauties which he had already described: he *perceives* them now

as clearly as he did before; but so far from giving him back those transports which he had already felt, so far from enjoying that pleasure in which Dr. Blair makes taste consist, he views them with uneasiness and pain. They are no longer objects of satisfaction to him; and politeness alone induces him to remain with his friend. The latter, on the contrary, though ignorant of the first rudiments of painting, feels the most lively satisfaction at all the beauties and charms that are described to him. To apply this supposed case to Dr. Blair's definition of taste, it is obvious, if it consist in a power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art, that the connoisseur was a man of taste when he first visited the Louvre, and a man of no taste when he visited it the second time, though he was as well acquainted with the beauties of these celebrated paintings the second time as the first; and it is equally obvious, that those whom he conducted there, however ignorant we may suppose them to have been, were men of taste, in the most rigid sense of Dr. Blair's definition, if they felt that pleasure in which he makes taste consist. Taste, then, does not necessarily suppose the idea of pleasure, nor even the co-existence of a power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art, unless we admit, what cannot be admitted, that a man may be acquainted with the

beauties of nature and of art, and yet be destitute of taste, and that a man, ignorant of both, may possess it in the highest degree. It is no argument to say, that the connoisseur would have felt as much pleasure as either of his friends in contemplating the paintings when he returned to the Louvre, if he had not exhausted himself with too much exertion; for a thousand other circumstances might have prevented him from enjoying the least delight in these paintings; and if these circumstances should continue for life, they would always exercise their influence over him, so that it could never be known that he was a man of taste, because he never evinced that pleasure in which it is made to consist, though his acquaintance with the beauties of art might have been generally known and admired.

Nothing, indeed, can be more certain, than that men of the most exquisite taste, confining the term, as I have done, to the mere power of *discriminating* beauty, are not always those who are most strongly affected by its influence; and I am inclined to think, that very satisfactory reasons may be adduced to shew, that the best judges cannot be the most ardent admirers of beauty. Of all other attainments, taste requires the highest degree of cultivation: sensibility, of all our natural endowments, requires the least. It is so tender a plant, that any attempt to improve, only

serves to injure it,—to strip it of that keen and eager susceptibility of delight which it has received from nature. In proportion as we inquire into its properties, and the causes by which it is apt to be excited, we render it less disposed to yield to them, though we extend our knowledge, and become better acquainted with these exciting causes. As the qualities of beauty are among the causes which affect our natural sensibility, it must therefore follow, that in proportion as we become more and more acquainted with these qualities, and the manner in which they excite their peculiar emotions, in the same proportion do we render this tender faculty less disposed to give way to their influence. When the young warrior first engages in a military life, every wound awakens his compassion; the expiring hero recalls to his mind all the tender recollections that cling to humanity; and his rage yielding to the sweetest of all voices, the voice of a common nature, and softened by feelings which he cannot control, he stoops to offer the last tribute of unavailing kindness to the agonizing brave. How different are the indurated feelings of the old veteran, to whom scenes of havock and destruction have long rendered death familiar in all its terrific and subduing aspects. Thus it is that the native sensibilities of the heart will neither endure to be

frequently exercised, nor too philosophically examined. Taste, on the contrary, requires the highest degree of cultivation; because correct ideas of beauty can only be acquired by frequently comparing different models of grace and elegance, and by consulting the state of our own feelings at the time, and the manner in which we are apt to be affected by each model which we place before us. "To acquire delicacy of taste," says Lord Kames, "a man must grow old in examining beauties and deformities." The effect of this perpetual recurrence to, and examination of our feelings, is, as I have just observed, to deprive them of their natural susceptibility of impressions, so that, by the time taste is become perfect, sensibility, in many persons, is worn to a skeleton. Hence it is, that when men arrive at correct ideas of beauty, they are least qualified to enjoy the pleasure which it is calculated to impart. We might, therefore, be led to suppose, that much sensibility is unfavourable to taste; and this supposition seems to be adopted by Mr. Stuart, where he says, that "a more than ordinary share of sensibility is apt to be regarded as pretty strong evidence of some deficiency in taste." I am inclined to think, however, that those who have originally the greatest portion of natural sensibility, have, ultimately, the most correct ideas of natural beauty; or, in other words, the

most refined and elegant taste, if they are equally attentive to its cultivation.

Our ideas of beauty are obviously derived from those pleasing and delightful emotions which it excites in the mind; but as it is difficult to awaken these emotions in a man who possesses but little natural sensibility, so must such a man not only have most difficulty in arriving at just ideas of the qualities that belong to it, because he has most difficulty in consulting those feelings from which its perceptions are derived, but also his small stock of natural sensibility is long exhausted before he can acquire an idea of those more perfect forms of beauty to which only a refined and cultivated taste can ever arrive. This refined and cultivated taste can, therefore, be acquired only by men who have originally a great portion of natural sensibility, however this original portion may be afterwards diminished, or the keenness of its delights tempered and modified by the cultivation of taste.

Had Mr. Stuart attended to this truth, he would not have been led into so important an error on the subject of taste. Too much sensibility he considers unfavourable to taste, but yet makes a certain portion of it necessary to the attainment of a refined taste. What this certain portion is, he does not attempt to define: he only thinks that too small a portion of it is as unfavourable to a

refined taste as too much. To this supposition he was, no doubt, led, by perceiving that those who have little natural sensibility, have never acquired a correct and elegant taste; and that, on the other hand, he saw this correct and elegant taste as seldom united to an ardent and glowing sensibility. It is certain, however, that whatever portion of sensibility nature has imparted to any man, it may exist during life, unaccompanied by taste, if its possessor does not give himself the habit of attending to the manner in which he finds himself affected by different models, or forms of beauty, so that taste is not necessarily connected with sensibility in any of its degrees; and he who gives himself this habit of attention will soon find his natural sensibility less "feelingly alive to each fine impulse," so that, as I have already observed, by the time his taste is completely formed, that extreme ardour of feeling which he experienced in his more untutored years, is less sensibly felt, or rather it is now ripened into a manly and rational habit of estimating, through the medium of reason and experience, and not through the delusive colouring of a glowing imagination, the just degree of influence which the beauties of nature and of art ought to possess over him. The chaste, manly, and elevated feelings which a man experiences after his taste is formed, compared to those which

spread a pleasing and agreeable tumult over his soul, in the undiscriminating season of youth and inexperience, may be aptly compared to the rich and luxuriant productions of Autumn, contrasted with the green and enchanting, but as yet unprized, and unproductive generations of Spring; and as every season has blessings peculiar to itself, so it is not to be doubted, but that the pleasing delusions of youth and inexperience are happily exchanged, in our riper years, for those more correct, more dignified, and more rational feelings which belong to a refined and cultivated taste. Sensibility, however, though as distinct from taste as the mind is from ideas, is the only basis on which a correct taste ever was, or ever will be founded. Many of the numberless errors that have been adopted on the subject of taste and sensibility, have entirely originated from not attending to the revolution that takes place in our youthful emotions during the cultivation of taste. The more frequently we appeal to that warm and glowing sensibility which is affected by the perception of beauty, the less keenly and sensibly does it respond to our appeal, though the perception of beauty is rendered more penetrating and acute. Nothing can place this truth in a clearer light, than the revived ardour and enthusiasm which we feel on resuming some favourite study which we had long neglected. He who

unremittingly applies himself to any literary pursuit, and, from the pleasure which he enjoyed when he first engaged in it, determines never to desist till he becomes complete master of it, will soon find himself overpowered in the prosecution of his design. He perceives his energies of application become daily more and more languid: his mind is continually, though unconsciously straying to other scenes of contemplation; and he frequently rises from study, surprised to find that he has not added a particle of information to what he knew at sitting down. If, however, he should impose such restrictions on his mind as to force it to an exclusive attention to a study from which it is perpetually endeavouring to withdraw itself, it is not improbable but this violence which he offers to the efforts which the mind makes to release itself from a dull and stupid uniformity of pursuit, or rather which he offers to that particular faculty in man, whatever it be, that equally loathes uniformity and variety, unless blended with each other, may, at length, create an insurmountable disgust to a study which, of all others, was at first the most pleasing and delightful. I recollect that having begun to translate Cicero's Orations before I was well acquainted with the first elementary books of the Latin language, from a premature desire of being early acquainted with the prince of Latin orators, the difficulties which

I had to encounter in labouring to comprehend his long and majestic periods, often rendered still more difficult by an involution of clauses and of arguments, were so many and so great, and my determination, at the same time, not to desist till I became acquainted with the illustrious Roman, was so fixed and immovable, that for some years after I could not endure to look into Cicero's Orations, or even to open it accidentally, without turning from it with an unaccountable sensation of disgust. I can, however, read Cicero at present with as much pleasure as I anticipated at first. That unaccountable aversion which I had long felt subsiding by degrees, and by totally neglecting to look at the author for some years, I can now recollect the sensation without feeling its influence. I am therefore inclined to think, that all studies are less agreeable, less a source of delight immediately after they are attained, than if resumed after a lapse of a few years; a proof that the cultivation of taste, while it extends our knowledge, only weakens the pleasure which it originally imparts. Hence it is, that the emotion of pleasure, or, as it is called, the emotion of taste, so seldom accompanies that perception of beauty, in which taste properly consists, though it is this pleasure that originally induces us to cultivate, and enables us to acquire, that perception of beauty which constitutes taste.

But if it consist in an emotion of pleasure, it necessarily follows, that no man can be a judge of beauty but he who is pleased with it; whereas it is notorious that some of the most critical judges are pleased the least. They cannot acquire a perfect knowledge of any particular form or feature in beauty without remarking and contemplating it frequently, and this frequency of contemplation weakens the pleasure of the effect. "I despair," says Mr. Burke, the most celebrated writer on the subject of taste and beauty, "of ever perceiving the same degree of pleasure from the most excellent performances of genius, which I felt at that age (he means the morning of his days) from pieces which my present judgment regards as trifling and contemptible." The progress of our pleasure, so far, therefore, from keeping pace with the progress of our taste, becomes retrograde. I am, however, inclined to think, that the pleasure of which Mr. Burke despaired was afterwards partly realized. His "Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful" was written at an early age, and before he tried his strength in the political world. The organical effects, if I may so call them, produced by a long application to classical learning, and the mental irritability which they necessarily excite, had still a secret, though unobserved, influence over his mind, and created a certain unpleasant but

indefinable habit or modification of thought and feeling, a certain asperity in the finer organs, which were not natural to him, but which made him less fit to relish the beauties of sentiment, of imagination, and of sensibility, even in the most finished performances of genius. This asperity or want of relish for the beauties which they so clearly perceive, is, perhaps, more or less felt by all students, and more particularly, by all professors in colleges. A long habit of application to the same unvaried studies, and a still longer habit of making others acquainted with beauties which they have long ceased to relish themselves, produce an asperity of feeling which weakens, at least, if it does not entirely destroy, the pleasures which these studies are calculated to impart. It is probable, however, that Mr. Burke, after discontinuing his acquaintance with the classics for a considerable time, began to relish them more than when he wrote his *Sublime and Beautiful*, and was better able to avail himself of the knowledge which they imparted, than when he had this knowledge fresh upon his mind. How seldom have the most learned and eminent professors in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, or Dublin, distinguished themselves in the walks of science. How seldom have they illumined the world by their literary productions;—a circumstance, in my opinion, that

can only be accounted for, by that morose habit of mind, or asperity of temper, which I have just mentioned, and which produces a total want of relish for the beauties of science and general literature. Satiety is always the parent of disgust; and whenever we improve our taste by intense application, we are certain of not improving our pleasures. He who would improve his taste in such a manner as to secure a continuance of his pleasures, must never attempt to prosecute any study longer than he finds the prosecution attended with delight. By continually varying and returning to them again, he will not only improve his taste, but open to himself an endless source of rational delights; and though it will be longer before he can acquire a perfect acquaintance with any art or science, this delay is amply compensated, not only by the other sources of information that are laid open to him, and the aggregate of knowledge which he derives from them, but still more by that endless round of innocent gratifications which he eternally enjoys. A long and unremitting application to the same study has not limited his ideas to one sphere of information, nor irritated, or, rather, indurated his feelings to such a degree, as to leave him incapable of deriving pleasure, either from that which was once his favourite pursuit, or from any other

literary recreation. Every study to which he recurs, after a short remission, is still fraught with new pleasures; nor are these pleasures exhausted after returning to it again and again. How dissimilar are the gratifications that result from the pursuit of one unvaried train of studies, however poignant might have been the pleasures which they imparted at first. In this respect the pleasures of the mind bear the strictest analogy to those of the body. "The fragrance of the jessamine-bower," says Dr. Johnson, "is lost after the enjoyment of a few moments; and the Indian wanders among his native spices without any sense of their exhalations."

Thus it is, that an exquisite sensibility is seldom found to attend an exquisite taste, because we seldom vary our studies sufficiently to render them at all times delightful; and the pleasures of those arts of which we are perfect masters are less sensibly felt, than those which we derive from arts with which we are more imperfectly acquainted. Judging, then, from appearances, and from attending only to the slight degree of sensibility that is perceived to accompany taste, we might be led to imagine, that no one is more likely to acquire a correct and discerning taste, than he who possesses little natural sensibility; and that a more than ordinary portion of it must be particularly hurtful to taste.

Such is Mr. Stuart's opinion, when he says, that "In a mind where the degrèe of sensibility is extreme, the acquisition of a correct taste is, in ordinary cases, next to impossible." I am indeed willing to allow, that where exquisite sensibility exists without cultivation, or the habit of a philosophical attention to the manner in which we find ourselves affected by external objects, wrong biases, and false perceptions of beauty, may be very naturally imbibed. To ascertain, however, whether an extreme or a moderate degree of natural sensibility is productive of the chastest, and of the most elegant taste—to ascertain which of them will enable us to become the *elegans formarum spectator*, we must suppose the habits of attention to the emotions, affections, sensibilities, and delights, which are excited in us by beautiful objects, to be exactly equal; and if, after an equal attention to the modes, degrees, and character of the pleasure which is imparted by these objects, a man of moderate sensibility becomes a more perfect judge of elegance, grace, and speciousness, than he whose sensibility responds to the slightest of those influences which are excited by sensible or intellectual objects—he whose sympathies, to use the language of the poet, are *feelingly alive to each fine impulse*—it must then, indeed, be granted, that an exquisite sensibility is not so favourable to the culti-

vation of taste, as a more limited portion of that etherealizing sensation—a sensation which, from being the parent of taste, Akenside and Blair have both mistaken for taste itself." Before, however, we make this concession to Mr. Stuart, or yield the superiority, in matters of taste, to a sensibility less plastic, or less susceptible of impressions, we must observe, that beauty, whether sensible or intellectual, is the direct object of taste;—that what we denominate beauty is nothing but certain qualities in matter or in mind which produce certain sensations in us; and that we are accustomed to designate the object in which these qualities inhere, and which excite these emotions, by the epithet beautiful. If, then, the term beautiful take its name from certain emotions produced in us by the mental or visible presence of intellectual or sensible objects, it necessarily follows, that whoever is most susceptible of the emotions produced by these external influences, whoever yields with least resistance to the power which they exert, must necessarily be better qualified to recognise and perceive those qualities in body and in mind which excite the emotions, if he pay equal attention to them, than a person who cannot feel them but when they exert a stronger and more perceptible influence. That quality which is only known through the medium of emotions, must

surely be best known to him in whom the emotions are most easily excited, if he be as attentive to the exciting cause as a person by whom the emotion is not so distinctly felt; for he not only feels every emotion more sensibly than the latter, but he feels many emotions which the latter cannot feel at all. The man of grosser feelings cannot be moved by the slighter influences of beauty, and is therefore less apt to perceive her latent charms when they are communicable only through the medium of those finer and less perceptible *stimuli;* but he whose sensations are exquisitely attuned to all the harmonies of nature, yields to the slightest influence, and therefore has an opportunity of perceiving the cause of the slightest impression.

By what process of reasoning, then, can it be shown that an extreme sensibility is an impediment to the acquisition of a correct and refined taste? What is sensibility, when properly considered, but a quality in man of being affected by the qualities of sensible and intellectual being, or of every subject that can become an object of sensation? Where this quality is gross, its possessor can only discern the grosser and more palpable qualities of the beings that are without him: Where it is finer and more delicate, its possessor can discern those finer and minuter qualities that escape the former: Where this

quality is exquisitely fine, it can discern still finer and minuter qualities that are invisible to other eyes. If this were not the case, how can other animals discern qualities in the beings that surround them, which elude the most exquisite sensibility of man. We do not, it is true, require this extreme sensibility; but it is not the less certain, that if we possessed it, we could discern many qualities in objects, of which we shall never form the slightest conception. It must, therefore, be granted, that in proportion as our sensibility is acute, in the same proportion do we perceive qualities in objects which others cannot perceive; and it must equally be granted, that we are better qualified to judge of those objects than those who cannot feel them. Whether the possession of such exquisite feelings would tend to render us more or less happy, more or less perfect, on the whole, is a question of another nature: whether they would or would not, it would still be equally true, that they would render us better judges, and better qualified to discern the beauty or deformity of every object to which we directed our attention, which is all that I wish to establish; for if he who sees more is not a better judge than he who sees less, the man who possesses the eyes of a lynx can have no advantage over him who only sees through the "mole's dim curtain." With regard to happiness, my opinion

is, that, constituted as we are, it is impossible we can possess sensibility in such an exquisite degree as to render us unhappy. A different contexture of our organs must take place, before we can see like the lynx, feel like the spider, smell like the hound, or taste like the bee, whose

> ——— Sense, so subtly true,
> From poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew!

The apprehension of that man is therefore imaginary, who fears to become miserable by the cultivation of his feelings and sensibilities. The eye must possess a microscopic power, before it can perceive that tribe of invisible insects which inhabit the air which we breathe, and the water which we drink; and so of the other organs of sensation: so that our senses can never become the source of unhappiness to us from their extreme delicacy.

I have no doubt but the opinion, that extreme sensibility is hurtful to taste, originally proceeded from the affectation of some, and the extreme, nervous irritability of others. Some men affect to be pleased or displeased at every object that arrests their attention, though they are, in general, the most miserable judges of grace and beauty. Others, again, possess an extreme irritability of passion, that keeps them continually fluctuating between pleasure and pain: they are at all times

either happy or miserable. "Upon any prosperous event," says an elegant writer, "their spirits are apt to be elevated beyond all bounds; and in adversity their grief pierces so deep into the tender frame that it becomes insupportable. It is possible perhaps, that, in some instances, they may have more lively enjoyments than men of a coarser mould; but then they have also more pungent sorrows. Occurrences which would have no effect upon a stronger mind, afflict them to the last degree; the most trivial disappointment, the omission of a ceremony, a careless word or gesture, nay even a look, will discompose their temper, and cast a heavy gloom on their minds."* From a general observation, that neither of these characters are found to be excellent judges, in matters of taste, the opinion probably arose, that extreme sensibility was prejudicial to it. It is easy, indeed, to perceive, that if taste consist, according to Dr. Blair, in the mere power of receiving pleasure, this opinion would be founded in truth; but when it is understood to be a power of discriminating beauty, we have some reason to pause before we admit that this extreme delicacy of passion is hurtful to taste. In the first place it is an error to suppose, as I have already shewn, that mere sensibility

* *Fugitive Pieces. Essay on Delicacy. Dialogue II.*

implies taste, as taste requires judgment, observation, and experience, and these again require a fund of information which many men of extreme sensibility do not possess. We cannot therefore conclude, that extreme sensibility is hurtful to taste, till we are first prepared to shew that those who possess it, have all the other requisites of a good taste, as judgment, observation, experience, and so forth. If they have neglected to cultivate that strong sense and sound understanding, that variety of learning and extensive scope of information, without which it is idle to lay any claims to taste, are we to expect that merely because they possess an extreme delicacy of feeling, though totally destitute of these acquirements, they should be perfect judges of beauty, either sensible or intellectual? We do not seek for, or expect this critical and elegant taste in men of little sensibility, when devoid of these preliminary requisites which I have just mentioned; and, if we had not erroneously confounded sensibility with taste, we should not expect it in men of the most exquisite sensibility. To form a proper judgment on the subject, and to ascertain, with certainty, whether those who possess an exquisite delicacy of feeling, and who are easily affected by joy and sorrow, are unqualified to become excellent judges in matters of taste, we must first give them all the facilities and put them in pos-

session of all those preliminary requisites without which, as I have already observed, it is idle to set up for judges of elegance or beauty. It is allowed on all hands, that in judging of the beauties of any art, we should be guided by the most finished productions or compositions which that art has furnished; if then we have not a previous acquaintance with these compositions, how can mere sensibility supply the absence of this knowledge, unless we suppose it gifted with inspiration. I believe, however, it will always be found, that men who are thus easily pleased or displeased on the most trifling occasions, are men who evince little of that knowledge, experience, observation, and critical attention to the appearances of things, on which taste is founded. They are people who possess all the elements of a fine taste, and who would be critical judges of grace and beauty, if they cultivated that faculty which nature bestowed upon them. It would, I believe, also be found, that this cultivation of their native sensibility, so far from rendering them still more susceptible of pain and pleasure, so far from rendering their happiness more dependent on the contingencies and occurrences of human life, would rather moderate, as I have before shewn, and temper the exquisite poignancy and natural delicacy of their feelings, would give them a rational habit of thinking and of acting, and by the expe-

rience which it would afford them, the pleasures of imagination with which it would supply them, and the unbounded scope of philosophical inquiries which it would open to their view, place them on that proud eminence whence they could view with indifference those empty trifles, and puerile considerations by which they were formerly disturbed. I am therefore inclined to think, that the error of supposing extreme delicacy of *passion*, or delicacy of *feeling*, (both of which I consider different modifications of our natural sensibility, as it happens to be accidentally determined by the circumstances of life,) to be hurtful to taste, has originated from that more generally diffused error, of confounding taste with sensibility.

As to those who *affect* to be pleased or displeased at every object that fixes their attention, and who are known, at the same time, to possess very little taste, I have only to reply, that no argument can be drawn from affectation. It might as well be maintained, that virtue is a farce, because hypocrites affect to be virtuous. The following sensible reflections on these characters, by Dr. Gerard, may be entertaining to the reader. Treating of those who are extravagant both of praise and censure, he observes, with great justice, that "this extravagance proceeds much less commonly from excess of sensibility, than from a defect in the other requisites of fine taste; from an incapacity

to distinguish and ascertain, with precision, different degrees of excellence or faultiness. Instead of forming an adequate idea of the nature of the beauty or deformity, we go beyond all bounds of moderation, and when we want to express our sentiments, can do it only in general terms, tumid and exaggerated. If we are displeased, we signify it with the inveteracy of a Dennis, in terms of general invective; and without explaining the causes of our disapprobation, pronounce it poor, dull, wretched, execrable. If we are pleased, we cannot tell with what, how, or why, but only declare it fine, incomparable, with the unmeaning rapture of an ancient rhapsodist, who, without understanding the principles of art, or the sense of an author, like a madman, really agitated by the fury which the poets feigned, could recite or praise them with such vehemence, as transported himself, and astonished his auditors."

"From Plato's dialogue inscribed '*Io*,'" adds the Doctor, in a note, "we learn that there were men of this character, who travelled through Greece, and contended at the public festivals. Their chief employment was to repeat beautiful passages from the poets, particularly Homer, with a rapturous and enthusiastic pronunciation, as if they had an exquisite and warm perception of their excellence. It is probable that they also declaimed in praise of their favourite verses:

this seems to be implied in the expressions, περὶ ποιητοῦ διαλέγειν περὶ Ὁμήρου λέγειν καὶ ἐυπορεῖν, and is insinuated by the proof which Socrates produces of their ignorance of art, from the capacity of every real artist to distinguish beauties from faults, and to point them out in the works of any performer in the kind. Socrates proves, from the concessions of his antagonist, that neither did his sentiments proceed from true taste, from a vigorous perception of the beauties he recited, nor his encomiums from judgment, from a critical skill in the principles of beauty. He therefore, in his usual strain of irony, resolves both into an unaccountable agitation of spirit, proceeding either from madness or from inspiration; and, with great humour, compares the several Muses to as many magnets. The Muse inspires the poet without any agency or knowledge of his; he, in the same manner, conveys the inspiration to his rhapsodist; and he to his attentive hearers: just as the loadstone, by its imperceptible and unaccountable influence, attracts a ring of iron, that a second, and that a third."

From what has been now said, it appears, that the more bountiful nature has been to us in the faculty of feeling, the more capable we are of becoming elegant judges of the beauties of nature and of art; but that the mere possession of feeling or sensibility, by no means implies the pos-

session of taste, unless this feeling or sensibility be attended with all the other requisites of a perfect taste. It is this latter error that has led to so many false hypotheses on the subject of taste; because such a principle being once admitted, we look up to every man who is endowed by nature with an exquisite feeling, as a man of taste; and afterwards, on finding ourselves deceived, we either run over to the opposite extreme, and maintain that sensibility is hurtful to taste, or we give up the subject in despair, and consider taste as something that has nothing fixed and determined in its nature, and to be as variable and fluctuating as the biases and propensities of the human race.

Those who maintain, that sensibility is rather the matter of taste, than the basis on which it is founded, may, perhaps, object, that the pleasure imparted by beautiful objects does not result from any perception of their beauty,—that we are pleased with a beautiful object the moment we look upon it, and do not suspend the pleasure till we first perceive the cause by which it is excited;—that the perception of beauty must, therefore, follow, and not precede the emotion which is felt; and that, consequently, we do not know what beauty is, and if not, that we cannot possess taste, till we first feel the pleasing emotion which it produces in the soul; that this

emotion is, therefore, inseparably connected with that discriminating perception of beauty in which I have made taste to consist. This reasoning, no doubt, will appear not only plausible, but conclusive to those who consider taste an instinctive faculty that discerns beauty at a glance, without any previous perception or exercise of judgment; nor do I doubt but the difficulty of getting over it, has led our acutest writers on the subject of taste into many errors. They have all seen, that judgment and experience are necessary to form a correct and elegant taste; but feeling, at the same time, that the emotion of pleasure which the presence of a beautiful object excites in the mind, is instantaneous, and outstrips the celerity of reason, they have proceeded in their theory as if they admitted both truths, at the same moment, an admission, however, which is as unphilosophical as it is absurd. It is this error that has led some eminent writers even so far as to limit the province of taste to the mere power of receiving pleasure from beauty, as Dr. Blair and Akenside; and even those who saw, that a general and enlarged acquaintance with, or antecedent perception of the qualities that constitute beauty in any particular object, was an essential part of taste, still associate with this antecedent knowledge a faculty or power of receiving pleasure from the object, with the beauty of which it made

them acquainted. Thus Burke defines taste to be "that *faculty*, or those faculties of the mind which are *affected with*, or which form a judgment of, the works of imagination and the elegant arts." Allison defines it: "that faculty of the human mind, by which we perceive and *enjoy* whatever is beautiful or sublime in the works of nature or art." Reid makes it consist in a power of discerning and *relishing* these beauties. Voltaire, after defining taste to be "a quick discernment, a sudden perception, which like the sensation of the palate anticipates reflection," adds, "that this beauty must be *felt* as well as *perceived;* the mind must be *touched* and *affected* by it in a lively and sensible manner." Montesquieu defines it to be "something which *attaches* us to certain objects by the power of an internal sense or feeling," without deeming it a necessary qualification to possess the power of discriminating what quality in the object creates this attachment. If all these definitions of taste be correct, it follows, that a man who has the most extended acquaintance with all the qualities that render any particular object beautiful, is, notwithstanding, destitute of taste, if he cannot feel pleased whenever the object is presented to him; and that the critic who can discern all the beauties and defects of an author, is equally destitute of taste unless he feel an emotion of pleasure in passing

over the former, and, if we may reason from analogy, an emotion of displeasure in meeting with the latter.

I am not sceptical enough to suppose, that men of taste and critics, who, if well versed in the principles of their art, are, in the most rigid sense of the expression, men of taste, as well as the most elegant judges of painting, sculpture, and sensible beauty, do not generally feel the pleasing and disagreeable emotions which the beauties and faults of which they take cognizance, are, in themselves, calculated to excite. I would only guard against the doctrine which renders such emotions indispensably necessary to all who can justly make any pretensions to taste, believing, as I do, that it is possible for them not to feel such emotions in the slightest degree, and yet possess as correct and natural a taste as when they yield with rapture to their delightful influence. Neither am I inclined to think, that taste is a *faculty* either of discerning or relishing sensible or intellectual beauty. I consider it rather the exercise of a faculty than a faculty itself. It is a simple perception of beauty which is acquired by a proper exercise of our natural sensibility, and a strict attention to the manner in which it is affected by certain qualities of matter and of mind. If taste were a mere faculty, we should all indiscriminately be men of taste,

because all men possess the faculty of acquiring it, at least in a limited degree, if it were properly cultivated.

It matters, however, but little to know, whether taste be a faculty, or the exercise of a faculty: what we are solicitous of ascertaining, is, whether it be an original or acquired power of the mind; —an instant emotion of delight, at the presence of beauty, or an acquired power of discriminating wherein the qualities of beauty consist; or whether the power and the perception must necessarily accompany each other. Perhaps it may be thought, that the distinction is unnecessary, and that even if taste consisted in the power of discriminating, and not of feeling the emotion of beauty, we might still admit the emotion to form a part of the definition of taste, as it generally accompanies the perception. But this would lead us into a most important error, an error that would unavoidably distract, if not confound, all our subsequent reasoning on the subject; and indeed it is easy to perceive, that the moment we annex an additional idea to any subject of discussion, we are no longer treating of the subject at all, but of some other which we had mistaken for it. The writer who treats of taste as consisting of a certain class of perceptions, combined with a certain class of emotions, must proceed very differently from him who makes it consist in

perceptions alone, which either may or may not be accompanied by emotions. It is, then, of the utmost importance to ascertain whether taste consist in the discriminating power alone, or in a power of feeling and discriminating at the same time. One capital error alone that must unavoidably result from mistaking the proper and distinct nature of taste, will serve to convince us that this distinction is of importance. If taste consist in emotions and perceptions, the man who is blind to all the beauties of Homer and Milton, to all the graces of Raphael and Angelo, till they are pointed out to him, is a man of taste, if he swell into rapture as soon as the discovery is made; but the person who points out to him the beauties and graces of these inimitable productions, is a man of no taste, if he feel not the emotion of delight, when he discerns the beauty which is adapted to produce it. If, on the contrary, taste consist in the mere power of discriminating beauty, the latter is the man of taste; the former, with all his raptures, can be allowed no pretensions to it.

But if taste consist in the mere power of discriminating the qualities which constitute the beauty of any object, how are we to get over the formidable objection, that we know not what beauty is, nor can we even have the most abstract conception of it, till we first feel the pleas-

ing emotion which it produces in the soul; that this feeling must, therefore, necessarily precede the power of perceiving or discriminating the qualities of beauty; and that, consequently, the man who has not first felt the emotion of beauty, can never perceive the quality by which it is excited, and therefore can never become a man of taste.

The force of this reasoning I am willing to allow in its fullest latitude; but what does it ultimately prove, but that feeling or emotion is the parent of taste, or, in other words, that we must feel before we can discern the qualities of beauty—a truth on which I have already so strongly insisted? It does not, however, follow, that, having once felt before we discerned, we must continue to feel before we discern ever after. On the contrary, having once perceived, through the medium of feeling, any quality of beauty, we can, ever after, whether the feeling recur or not, continue to perceive the same quality, if we attended to it at the time when it was first felt and discerned. It is by this attention to the causes of our feelings, or, in other words, to the qualities in matter and in mind by which they are produced, that taste is gradually formed; for we may continue to feel emotions during life without being able to point out the qualities by which they are produced, unless we note them at the time when

the emotion is excited. It is by this habit of noting each individual quality which produces the emotion of beauty, that we obtain a facility in recognising them whenever we meet them afterwards, separately, or in company with each other; and such is the celerity with which they are recognised, that we can detect a thousand different beauties in a subject, before any one of them has time to produce its own correspondent emotion, in a manner sufficiently sensible to be distinctly felt. It is thus taste is formed: it is by this habit of attention to the sensible and intellectual qualities by which we are moved, that we at length acquire the power of distinguishing, in every object, all the qualities that are adapted to excite the emotion of beauty in minds susceptible of their influence, whether we continue to feel them ourselves or not. How differently would a spectator, who has never paid any attention to the qualities of beauty by which he has been frequently moved, view a painting in which innumerable beauties have been grouped together. He feels, perhaps, but one uniform effect, one simple emotion, from an object in which a thousand causes of pleasing emotions exist. He knows not how the effect he feels is produced, and were he even endowed with that exquisite sensibility which instinctively receives from every quality of beauty that peculiar modification of feeling,—that

sense of delight which it is calculated to impart, and were he accordingly impressed with that rapturous train of corresponding emotions which all these collected beauties were intended by the artist to communicate to the discriminating eye of taste, he would still be ignorant of the manner in which the effect was produced, because he is unacquainted with the qualities of beauty, though he gives testimony to their pleasing and delightful influence. Such a man may be called a man of exquisite sensibility, but cannot be called a man of taste, because he cannot tell why he is pleased, or discern what qualities in the painting give him most particular delight; neither does he know how each individual beauty affects and is affected by the assemblage of beauties with which it associates. He only knows that he is pleased; —that he feels an agreeable tumult of delightful emotions; but beyond this he knows nothing. Not so with the man of taste;—possessed, perhaps, of less sensibility than the former, he can discriminate, notwithstanding, every feature of beauty which the artist has introduced into his work, and can, therefore, refer to all the causes of pleasure, or qualities of beauty, that are engrafted upon it; and therefore, though he may look on them without feeling that vivid and lively pleasure which the former enjoys, he can still tell all the distinct qualities by which this pleasure is im-

parted. He possesses another advantage, which particularly distinguishes him from the man of mere sensibility: if his taste be more refined than that of the artist whose production is placed before him, he perceives many things that would heighten its beauty: he perceives whatever is inelegant in the design, affected, or unnatural in the expression, ungraceful in the attitude, or unskilful in the execution. This is a knowledge to which the man of mere sensibilty has no pretensions. Any alterations which he may propose, so far from improving, may only spoil the general effect. He may, for instance, condemn the taste of the ancient Romans, who preferred black eyes to blue—*spectandum nigris oculis;* he may prefer one form of nose or lips to another; but should the artist comply with his taste, if taste it may be called, which is guided by no acquaintance with the rules of art, he would soon perceive, that the eyes, nose, lips, or expression which suited one person would not suit another, and that the alteration which he had suggested, so far from harmonizing with the other parts of the figure in which it was introduced, had rendered it, perhaps, a very monster.

Hence, then, we see the necessity of distinguishing between the man of taste and the man of mere sensibility. When we confine taste to those only who have that practical experience

of which I have spoken, and who, whether they are feelingly alive or not to each fine impulse, can always point out those qualities in objects which warm into existence this internal emotion in others, and which have often rendered themselves sensible of their chaste and captivating influence, we shall find that the *standard of taste* is not so difficult to be discovered as some would have us imagine. Men of refined taste seldom differ much in their ideas of beauty; but men who judge of beauty from their own immediate and individual emotions, who judge from what they feel, and not from any previous knowledge or experience, are eternally at variance on the subject. It is not wonderful, therefore, that an opinion should prevail, that beauty is no quality in objects, and has its existence only in the mind; nor is it more strange that the maxim, "it is fruitless to dispute concerning tastes," should descend into a proverb. This, it is true, is not the place to prove the existence of beauty in external objects; but as taste is conversant only in ideal perceptions; if beauty has only an imaginary being, I will examine, in the following chapter, whether there be any qualities in matter or in mind fitted to awaken in us the idea of beauty, or rather fitted to produce those emotions of delight to the exciting cause of which the term beautiful is applied.

CHAP. II.

On Beauty, abstractedly considered, as an Object of Taste.

If beauty be no quality in objects, it is certain that all disputes concerning taste must be extremely absurd, as it is disputing about a supposed something which has no existence. The object of taste, taking it even in the popular sense of the expression, is to *perceive* and *enjoy* the beauties of nature and of art. If, then, such beauties have no existence, taste is exercised in the discovery of a phantom of its own creation, and the best taste, consequently, cannot differ from the worst; because the good taste, as well as the bad, is in pursuit of a shadow, or rather the shadow of a shade.

It is certain that this sceptical opinion has entirely originated from that diversity of sentiment regarding beauty, which always has and always will prevail on the subject among men who judge of it, not from that experimental knowledge which I call taste, but from their own immediate feelings

and sensibilities. If a sufficient cause can be shewn why men should always differ in their ideas of beauty, who are guided in their judgments by no standard but that of the emotions which it diversely excites, it will not be difficult to perceive why the opinion should prevail, that beauty is no quality in objects. Those who judge of beauty by the emotion which it excites, are infinitely more in number than those who judge of it from that experience which is acquired by taste, or, to speak more explicitly, the former compose the bulk of pretenders to taste. It must, therefore, naturally occur to them, that as they can never agree in their ideas, even of those more obvious beauties with which they are chiefly conversant, and as almost each of them creates a beauty of his own, or at least imagines that he perceives beauty in an object which is devoid of it to all but himself, it must, I say, under these circumstances, naturally occur to them, that beauty is only the creation of the brain, and has no real existence in the nature of things. That such an opinion should prevail among those who cannot agree in their ideas of beauty, appears to me very natural, and it requires little experience to know that those who are thus divided on the subject are the most numerous class of judges. It is equally certain that this class judge of beauty without

any rule or standard whatever, but that of their own feelings; and if, while the common feelings of mankind are allowed to be the true standard of taste, it can be shewn that the particular feelings of every individual are, in general, calculated to deceive him, it must necessarily follow, that all who judge of beauty by their own feelings are apt to differ with each other, and consequently apt to adopt the opinion that beauty has no real existence in the nature of things. The point to be proved therefore is, that the particular feelings of every individual are apt to deceive him in forming an estimate of beauty, when he has recourse to no other standard; for if this can be proved, it accounts not only for the scepticism which has prevailed on the subject, but it also evinces, that every individual who would form a correct idea of beauty, must look for some other standard beyond that of his own feelings, or, in other words, that though we can form no idea of beauty without consulting our own feelings, there is still a higher tribunal to which we must ultimately appeal.

To shew, then, that every one is liable to be mistaken, if he trust to his own feelings, in his perception of beauty, it must be observed, that we all, or the greater part of us, differ more or less in that exact portion of natural sensibility which we inherit from nature; that we are born with diffe-

rent tempers, propensities, natural biases, and peculiarities of disposition; that these original and predisposing affections are again broken and modified by acquired habits, local prejudices, the influence of political and religious impressions, sometimes contracting, sometimes expanding the native energies and faculties of the mind, and by a thousand other influencing causes that remove us still farther from each other than our natural or original affections would have done; that all these causes strongly influence our judgments, opinions, and estimate of things; that all our reasonings and conclusions, in a word, that every branch of our nature is powerfully determined by them, except that exercise of reason which is conversant only in demonstrative truths, or truths that have no relation to the nature of man, and which would be equally true if such a being as man had never been created. Thus circumstanced, it is not to be expected that we should be all equally affected by the same causes, though these causes are immutable in their own nature, and always act upon us with the same force. No truth can be more demonstratively certain, than that similar causes, operating on similar subjects, will produce similar effects; and that similar causes, operating on dissimilar subjects, will produce dissimilar effects. Those qualities in matter which excite in us the emotion of beauty, are *causes* which always act

with equal force: we are the *subjects* on which they act, and the emotions which we feel are the *effects* which they produce. Here, then, we have similar causes acting upon dissimilar subjects, for such we have shewn men to be from the diversity of their character; and it is, therefore, demonstratively certain that the effects which these causes produce must be dissimilar; that is, it is certain, that though the qualities of beauty are always the same, they can never excite in us the same emotions, though they act upon us all with the same force. A familiar example will render this more evident. A physician orders the same medicine to twenty different people: each of them takes exactly the same quantity; but the effect which it produces will be different in them all. On one man it will have no effect, or rather its effect is not sensibly perceived; on another it produces a slight effect, on another a stronger, and on another a very powerful effect. In a word, the effect will vary in each of them, though the operating cause is still the same. If, then, we were to reason like those who maintain, that beauty is no quality in objects because it excites a different emotion, or a different effect in different people, we should conclude, that the different effects produced by this medical preparation were not owing to any virtual or positive quality belonging to itself, as it did not pro-

duce one uniform effect in each of those who took it, But it is certain, that the medicine acted upon each of them with the same force, attempted to produce one uniform effect in them all, and would have done so, had they been all of the same habit and temperament of body; but in proportion as they resisted or yielded to the power with which it acted, in the same proportion was its effect varied and diversified. If the physician wished to produce the same effect in them all, he should vary the quantity of the medicine which he gave to each; so that, in this case, the effect would be the same, though the cause would be different. So far, then, from concluding, that there is any thing mutable, or uncertain, in the nature of beauty, from the different emotions which it excites in different people, we should rather conclude, that no stronger evidence can be required of its immutable nature, than the diversity of effects; or, in other words, the diversity of emotions which it excites in different men. If it produced the same emotions in all men, nothing could be more certain, than that the qualities of beauty are neither equable nor constantly the same; that it varied and adapted itself to the different habits, feelings, and natural sensibilities of each individual; and that, consequently, it was no subject of taste or criticism, no quality in matter that could be laid hold of, or reduced to science, and

that it was as volatile and inconstant as the various propensities, affections, and even eccentricities of the human race.

Thus it is, that the same philosophy which has been so ingeniously employed in stripping the works of nature of all that beauty in which our beneficent creator had originally clothed them, enables us to vindicate the grandeur and immutability of those original attributes which his eternal wisdom has impressed upon his works. For it must be observed, that the scepticism which has prevailed relative to the existence of beauty in objects, has not been confined to those with whom it was most likely to originate; namely, those who always judge by their own proper feelings; but has found advocates of no ordinary character in the philosophic world. Berkely, in maintaining the inexistence of matter, involves in his theory the inexistence of beauty. Hume, without availing himself of that universal scepticism by which he has attempted to subvert our belief in the existence of matter and of mind, denies the existence of beauty in objects, and places it solely in the mind.

"Beauty," he says, "is no quality in things themselves, it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them, and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity where another is sensible of beauty;

and every one ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek the real beauty or the real deformity is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or bitter, and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes. It is very natural, and even quite necessary, to extend this axiom to mental as well as bodily taste."

If beauty, according to this theory of Mr. Hume, exist not in things, but in the mind that perceives them, why is the presence of these things necessary before we have any perception of beauty in the mind? That which exists in the mind, and only in the mind, can be perceived by the mind; or if it cannot, so far from having any certainty of its existing there, even the possibility of its existence would never have occurred to us. All existence, even that of the mind itself, is made known to us by perception; no matter whether this perception be acquired through consciousness, or the intelligence conveyed through the intervention of the reasoning or sensitive faculties. We cannot, therefore, affirm the existence of any thing, of which we have no perception, of which no sensible or abstract image ever presented itself to our minds; because, if it even did exist, its existence is concealed from us. It is evident, then, that if we never perceived or felt conscious

of the existence of beauty in the mind, we could never think of its existing there: and so far from maintaining the position, we should never dream of it. Remove, then, the presence of external objects, and all this consciousness or perception of beauty, in or out of the mind, is removed along with it; and so far from defending its existence any where, the faintest image of beauty would never present itself to us; nor could all the ingenuity of man ever reflect that such a thing as beauty could exist at all.

The argument which I have here advanced against this celebrated sceptic, supposes the existence of things, because it is admitted by himself, when he says, that beauty does not exist in things, but in the mind which contemplates them. To contemplate things is to admit their existence, as we could not contemplate what did not exist. But granting, for a moment, that Hume's theory is founded on that universal scepticism which has led him to deny the existence of matter and of mind, and to admit no existence but that of ideas, it must necessarily follow, that Mr. Hume's ideas can suggest no ideas to us, because this would be to admit the existence of Hume himself, and consequently of something beyond us which excites ideas in our mind. But to admit Hume's existence is to admit the existence of the material world. His contemporaries might justly argue thus:

If it be true, as we imagine, that Mr. Hume exists, and has written objections to beauty residing in objects, it is equally true that we have no evidence of his existence, or of the characters inscribed on the paper on which he wrote, or of the books printed from these characters, through which his ideas are communicated to us, but the testimony of our sight; and if this organ of sensation has given faithful testimony in this case, we must admit its evidence in the existence of all objects which it presents to us. No reason can be shewn why we should admit its testimony in the one case and refuse to give it credence in any other. If, on the contrary, it be true that our eyes have imposed on us, that such a person as Hume never existed, and that the image which they presented of him was an ideal mockery; if neither we nor the printer ever saw the paper on which he wrote, the characters inscribed on it, nor the works printed from these characters, and published under his name, it is equally true, that no objections have ever been made to the existence of beauty in sensible objects by Hume, and that we never read any objections of his on paper, inasmuch as both he and the paper on which he wrote, the characters inscribed on it, and the books printed from these characters, are all a delusion. We have therefore a right to treat the subject of beauty as if Hume had never written a word concerning it, and to

consider these objections attributed to Hume, but which he never made use of, as mere chimeras, vagaries, or creations of our own imagination, which has given existence to a phantom, for no other purpose than that of arguing us out of our senses, and making us doubt the existence of those very faculties which have given existence to this doubt.

But, perhaps, I may be told, that though the visible person whom we call Mr. Hume never existed, his ideas did; and that it is by a communication of his ideas to us, that we are informed of beauty residing only in the mind. Grant it;—it follows, in the first place, that those ideas which we call Mr. Hume's ideas, belonged to no person; for to suppose they did, would be to admit the existence of a person, and consequently the existence of matter or of mind, both of which he rejects, and in rejecting them he rejects the idea of personality: it follows, in the second place, that if they are a mere train of existing ideas belonging to no person, and having no person to vouch for their truth, we can place no reliance on them, because they impose on us, in the first instance, by presenting themselves as the ideas of a person that never did, or never could exist, according to their own doctrine, which denies the existence of matter altogether. This train of ideas, then, which we attribute to Hume, impose on us by persuading us at first,

that they belong to a Mr. Hume; but having once gained an admission under the authority of his name, they tell us afterwards, that this Mr. Hume never existed. What reliance then can we place on these ideas of Mr. Hume, when they tell us subsequently that beauty resides not in the object which we contemplate, but in the mind which contemplates it; and when they tell us, elsewhere, that this contemplating mind in which beauty exists, has no existence of its own, and that both it and the object are mere delusions? Indeed, to admit once the doctrine of Hume, that nothing exists but ideas, is to reject every thing that these ideas would make us believe. Our ideas are continually informing us of the existence of an external, material creation; every moment of our lives they endeavour to impress us with a sense of this truth: if they are to be credited, then, we have a right to believe in this material world; if not, what right have we to believe in them, when they tell us that this material world has no existence? Are we obliged to believe them when they deny the material world, though they seldom do so, and even then tremulously and faintly, as if they felt conscious of an attempt to impose upon us; while we are permitted to disbelieve them, when they tell us strongly, forcibly, and eternally, that objects exist without us, and when they tell us so, not

as before, with a faint and hesitating probability, but with all the certainty of conviction, and all the superadded evidences of demonstration? It serves no purpose to argue that our evidence of external existence is merely borrowed from the senses, and not communicated by ideas, because the doctrine which maintains the existence of ideas alone, necessarily destroys the existence of the senses; so that all our ideas, however they may seem to us to come through the senses, must, in this case, be pure, unbodied, immaterial, and unsensed perceptions.

This much I thought necessary to say, relative to such arguments as might be founded on that universal scepticism of Hume, which equally rejects the existence of mind and matter; not that Hume himself has founded his objections to the existence of beauty in external objects, on the inexistence of matter, much less of mind, but that such objections might be made by other sceptics, founded on the general tenour and spirit of his philosophical works.

Another objection to the existence of beauty in external objects, remains still to be answered; —namely, that which maintains, that beauty cannot be a quality belonging to objects, inasmuch as this quality can produce no emotions in us without our own co-operation; that if we resist the emotion, it cannot be produced; and that,

consequently, the quality exciting the emotion cannot reside in the object, but in ourselves.

This doctrine is erroneous; first, because it is founded on a false assumption; and, secondly, because, if the assumption were even true, it would not, in the slightest degree, affect the truth of the doctrine which it aims to subvert.

First, it is not true that our co-operation is necessary to produce the emotion of beauty: all that is required of us is not to resist the power that acts upon us; and so far from any co-operation being necessary on our part, it is certain, that where beauty is perfect, it will produce its corresponding emotion, in spite of all our resistance. In vain shall we oppose the emotions which an object, perfectly beautiful, is calculated to excite: in vain shall we endeavour to convince ourselves, that we can sit in company with a beautiful woman, with a Venus or a Helen, without feeling any other emotions than those which we experience in the presence of an ordinary woman. We may, it is true, endeavour to resist the attractions of the most perfect female beauty, and even suppress, in some degree, the pleasing emotions which her presence would excite in more yielding and flexible minds, but the very effort to resist demonstrates the existence of that beauty which we endeavour to consign to the airy regions of imaginary existence. We

have no proof of our own existence but consciousness, and we are as conscious of the struggle which we feel, and of the resistance which we make, as we are of our own existence. But resistance always implies something resisted, and if this something did not exist, the resisting power could not exert itself. But the reality of that beauty which we resist, is not proved alone by the resistance made to it; for no effort of ours can entirely suppress the emotions that are excited by a beautiful woman. We perceive and feel that she is more formed to impart delight than ordinary women, however we may attempt to cloud the perception, or extinguish the feeling that imparts this information. Of this truth, Shakspeare gives us a beautiful example in Othello's soliloquy, previous to the murder of his wife. Though determined to put her to death, and to stifle those emotions which her beauty excited in his breast, he evidences, in the clearest manner, the potency of those charms to whose influence he was determined not to yield.

Othello. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;—
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause——Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of her's than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.

[*Lays down the sword.*

Yet she must die; else she'll betray more men.

Put out the light, and then— Put out the light!—
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent: but once put out *thy* light,
Thou cunningest pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relumine. [*Sets down the taper.*
When I have plucked thy rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again;
It needs must wither.—I'll smell thee on the tree;
[*Kissing her.*
Oh balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword!—One more; one more;
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after.—One more, that's the last,
So sweet was ne'er so fatal! I must weep,
But they are cruel tears! this sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love.

It is evident, therefore, that our co-operation is not necessary to give existence to those emotions which beauty is calculated to impart. On the contrary, it appears, that our utmost efforts cannot baffle its power, and that so far from requiring our co-operation, it forces itself upon us, whether we will or will not. But granting that our co-operation was necessary, it can still be demonstrated, in the second place, that what we call beauty resides entirely in the object, and not in us. To prove this we must observe, that *causes* are always distinguished from the subjects on which they act, and these again are distinguished from

the *effects* produced in them; for this simple and obvious reason, that the cause, the subject, and the effect, are three things clearly distinguishable from each other: the cause is one thing; the subject on which it acts is another; and the effect produced is different from both. It requires no argument to prove, that man is the subject on which beauty acts, that the emotions which he feels are the effects produced in him, and that beauty is the primary and acting cause to which these effects, or emotions, are immediately referred. If, then, beauty, which is the cause, has its entire existence in man, which is the subject, it follows, that this subject, man, acts and is acted upon, at the same moment; that is, that it is active and passive with regard to the same individual act, at the same indivisible moment—a conclusion which is in the highest degree absurd. It is true, that a subject may yield to one act, and produce another, at the same moment; but these are two distinct acts, and the effects produced by them are two distinct effects; but to say that a subject performs the very act to which it is yielding, is to assert what those who make the assertion must have some difficulty to comprehend. Those who maintain, that beauty has no existence of its own, because the co-operation of man is necessary to produce its corresponding emotion, might as well, and as

logically maintain, that when they unlock a door, the key has no existence of its own, and is contained in the lock, because the key could not unlock the door, if a lock had not been attached to it, adapted to the key. It is true, the co-operation of the lock, which is here the subject, is necessary: it must be adapted to the key, or the key will not unlock it; but, notwithstanding this adaptation, it is still the subject on which the key acts, and it would ever remain unlocked if the key had not been applied to it. The key, therefore, which is the cause of unlocking it, is as distinct from the lock in which the effect is produced, as the stamp is from the wax on which it impresses its image; or, to bring the analogy home to our present subject, as beauty is from the man in whom it produces its corresponding emotion. Our co-operation, therefore, to the production of this emotion, were it even necessary, would by no means prove, that beauty, of which it is the effect, has its existence in ourselves.

In the second part of this work, I shall have further occasion to enlarge on the proofs that demonstrate the existence of beauty in external objects, and to remove any remaining objections that may be advanced against it. This much I thought necessary to say at present, to shew, that taste, which is the proper subject of our

present investigation, and which is solely conversant in the discovery of beauty, is not sent forth in pursuit of a phantom, and that the object of its inquiries has a real existence in the nature of things.

If, then, it appear from what I have hitherto advanced, that beauty has a real existence in the beings without us, and if it appear that taste, which is conversant in the discovery of this beauty, does not consist in a mere susceptibility of pleasure from the beauties of nature or of art, but in a distinct and critical perception of them, whether this perception be or be not attended with that pleasure which they are calculated to impart; if it appear, at the same time, that though taste does not consist in sensibility, or a power of receiving pleasure, such a power must, notwithstanding, be vividly enjoyed, before a correct taste can ever be attained, it will be easy to perceive, that sensibility, or the power of enjoying the beauties of nature and art, is as distinct from taste, as genius is from learning. The possession of genius by no means implies the possession of learning: it is a mere faculty that enables a man to become learned if he will, or if circumstances permit him to cultivate and improve it. This faculty, however, may remain dormant: its possessor may never become acquainted with the first rudiments of science; and

if we suppose nature equally impartial in the distribution of her gifts, and as propitious to those who move unnoticed and unknown in the obscure privacy of humble life, as to those whom fortune, more partial and capricious in the distribution of her gifts, has distinguished by her favours, we must necessarily conclude, that those who dazzle mankind by the splendour and brilliancy of their genius, are far less in number than those who would have done so, had they the same facilities to assist their progress in the pursuits of science:—

> "But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
> Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unrol;
> Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul."

Burns

As genius, then, is frequently destined to droop unseen, "and waste its sweetness in the desert air," it is obvious that it may exist without learning; and it is equally obvious, that a man may possess a very considerable and even extensive portion of learning without a particle of pure genius. Taste, then, is to sensibility, what learning is to genius. Taste and learning may be acquired: sensibility and genius cannot. A man may possess much learning and taste who has neither genius nor sensibility, but then he has no certainty how far his learning or his taste is

correct. He is acquainted with the thoughts of other men, so far he is learned; he is acquainted with such models of beauty as are most generally approved of, so far he possesses taste, and is a connoisseur; and I believe it will be generally found, that a man possessing this knowledge, believes himself well entitled to pass for a man of taste; but though he is thus acquainted with the dogmas, sentiments, and opinions of other men, and with those forms of grace and beauty that are generally deemed most excellent, he is totally unacquainted with the truth of these dogmas, sentiments, and opinions, or the correctness of those models which are approved of by others, unless he possess those original faculties, not only of perceiving what others teach, but also of discerning how far their doctrines are agreeable to truth; and not only of committing to memory those models of beauty which are most highly esteemed, but also of *feeling* how far these models are adapted to awaken in us those emotions of pleasure or delight, which the original and instinctive beauties of nature are calculated to excite. Taste and learning may therefore exist to a very considerable degree without sensibility or genius, but can never be perfect where the latter are absent, because in this case we only know what others know, without any certainty that their knowledge is founded in truth.

If, then, it appear from what I have advanced, that taste does not consist in the mere power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature or of art, that this power may exist without taste, and that none are more likely to be deceived, than those who blindly trust to their own immediate feelings, it will naturally be asked, how are we to acquire that *perception* of beauty in which taste consists; and when acquired, what means have we of ascertaining that it is more correct than the perceptions of those who differ with us in opinion? The discussion of this question will form the subject of the ensuing chapter.

CHAP. III.

On the Standard of Taste.

THE *standard of taste*, or the discovery of some unerring *criterion* to which we might refer all our disputes on matters of taste, and from which there could be no ultimate appeal, has long exercised and baffled the researches of philosophy, and the acumen of genius. It is, however, certain, that if this standard could be discovered, it would be of as little use as the standard of truth. We all acknowledge that truth consists in representing the proper and distinct nature of things; but the difficulty still remains of finding out this proper nature. It is so with taste: we must all acknowledge, that the *common feeling of mankind* is the ultimate tribunal to which we should appeal; but the same difficulty still presents itself that impedes the progress of our researches after truth; namely, the difficulty of finding out this common feeling. The proper subject of our inquiries should therefore be, what faculties of our nature

should be exercised, in forming such a judgment of the beauty or ugliness of any particular object, as would agree with the common feeling of mankind. If we mistake the proper course which ought to be pursued, in acquiring this knowledge, or discriminating perception, we can scarcely flatter ourselves with the hope of ever attaining it. Here, however, a great diversity of sentiment prevails, some maintaining one opinion, and some another. This diversity of sentiment seems to have entirely arisen from two fundamental errors, which, if they be errors, must have a very considerable influence in determining the theories that have been adopted, on an assumption of their truth. The first is that mistaken idea of the nature and office of taste which I have endeavoured to correct, in the first chapter of this work; the second, an erroneous idea of the proper nature of reason, when employed on subjects of taste, and in considering it, as forming all its conclusions from abstract premises, without any previous reference to feeling or sentiment. No writer has taken a more profound and philosophic view of the nature of taste than D'Alembert; and his Essay on the subject proves him not only a profound thinker, but a refined and elegant writer, who possessed, in a very eminent degree, that discriminating perception in which taste consists. I cannot, however, help

thinking, that his philosophy, or, rather, a want of closer attention to his subject, has led him to a wrong conclusion, in determining the question now before us; namely, "whether," as he himself states it, "in judging concerning a work of taste, sentiment or feeling is to be preferred before reasoning and discussion?" To this question he replies by observing, "that *feeling* is undoubtedly the natural judge, for the first moment, and *discussion* for the second; and the second judge will almost always confirm the decisions of the first, in those persons who, with a quick and delicate sense of beauty, are so happy as to possess a just and accurate discernment. But the difficulty, it will be alleged, still remains; for as sentiment and discussion will not always be agreed, what must be done when they differ? Is it not best, in all cases, to follow sentiment for our guide, and hold always by its decision? Is it not a miserable occupation, will many ask, to be disputing against our agreeable sensations? And what obligations shall we lie under to philosophy, if it manifestly tend to diminish our pleasures? We cannot answer this latter question without the utmost regret, because we are obliged to acknowledge the effect of philosophy to be, in reality, what it is here represented to be."

With this conclusion of D'Alembert, I find

myself reluctantly obliged to differ. In the first place, if philosophy tend to diminish our pleasures, it is certain, that if the pleasures which it diminishes are not proper to be indulged, so far from regretting, we should rather congratulate ourselves on the redemption which it affords us from illicit gratifications. If, on the other hand, these pleasures be laudable in themselves, and designed by nature to impart happiness to man, it is equally certain, that the philosophy which would explode them, is a spurious philosophy, founded on erroneous principles, and drawing its conclusions from a mistaken view of the proper nature of man. I know it is usual to dignify false learning with the name of philosophy, and to veil the grossest errors under its protecting ægis; but the moment it is proved to be false, the moment it is allowed to subvert the original intention and designs of nature, its most zealous advocates must surely grant, that it is a mere excrescence which has been surreptitiously engrafted on the trunk of philosophy; in a word, that it belongs not to the original stock, and forms no part of that wisdom in which true philosophy consists. To be illumined by such a light, is to walk always in darkness; and to admit the excellence of philosophy, while it is admitted to lead us into error, and to deprive us of that happiness, and those pleasures

which nature intended us to enjoy, appears to me unworthy the great writer by whose authority it is sanctioned.

The truth, however, is, that D'Alembert was misled, at setting out, by confounding, as most writers have done, that discriminating power in which taste consists, with those instant emotions which almost every man feels at the presence of such objects as he acknowledges to be beautiful. He who makes these emotions the standard of taste, maintains, in fact, that taste is founded on no certain principles; that it veers about like the winds of heaven, and is constant only in its inconstancy. I have already shewn, from the constitution of our nature, and the various influences to which it is subject, that the same qualities of beauty, though always acting with equal force, must unavoidably produce different emotions in different people. I will now add, that the same individual, at different times, and under different circumstances, will feel himself differently affected by the same qualities of beauty. How different are our sentiments, when under the influence of passion, from those which we entertain when we listen to the cool dictates of reason.

"Passion," says Lord Kames, "hath such influence over us, as to give a false light to all its objects. Agreeable passions prepossess the mind in favour of their objects, and disagreeable pas-

sions not less against their objects. A woman is all perfection in her lover's opinion; while, in the eye of a rival beauty, she is awkward and disagreeable. When the passion of love is gone, beauty vanisheth with it. Nothing is left of that genteel motion, that sprightly conversation, those numberless graces, which formerly, in the lover's opinion, charmed all hearts. Our opinions, the result frequently of various and complicated views, are generally so slight and wavering, as readily to be susceptible of a bias from passion."

It is easy, then, to perceive, that in our estimate of things, we not only differ from each other, but also from ourselves, when our judgments are deduced from our immediate feelings, and not from any previous knowledge of the matter. This error in our judgments, extends not only to matters of taste, but prevails in every subject of human inquiry, connected with our passions, and capable of engaging or interesting our affections. To prefer *feeling*, therefore, to *discussion*, in ascertaining the beauty of any production either of nature or of art, is to be guided by a standard which is never the same, except in men whose equanimity of temper renders them superior to the influence of times and circumstances. Such men, however, are rarely to be met with, even in the most polished and refined nations; and it is only in such nations we can expect to meet with

them. In countries where arts and the progress of civilization have not softened and tempered the boisterous turbulence of savage independence, and native ferocity, those serene tempers that fly the approach of passion, and yield only to the chaste control and milder influence of nature, are, perhaps, not to be met with at all. At least

> ——— *Numero vix sunt totidem, quot*
> *Thebarum portæ, vel divitis ostia Nili.*

If, then, we are to trust to our own feelings, in determining the beauty of any object, it is certain, that there will be as many different standards of taste as there are different feelings, biases, tempers, humours, eccentricities, and fantastic associations in the minds of men. The standard by which one man is guided, will not only differ from the standard of all other men who differ with him in feeling, but the same man will throw away his own standard, and adopt another, whenever time or circumstance, joy or grief, love or hatred, enjoyment or privation, society or solitude, manhood or old age, impress a new character on that ductile mould of which his sensibilities are composed. Every new impression will produce a consequent revolution in all his judgments and opinions. He will not believe, it is true, contrary to what he believed before; but he will believe what he believed before with some addition or

diminution. This new modification of sentiment, which keeps pace with our feelings, and eternally pursues them in their mazy course, is not always perceived, because its progress is insensible, though constant. We seldom look beyond our present opinions, to examine whether they agree or disagree with those which we have formerly entertained. The change that takes place in many of them is too slight to fix our attention: we always continue to believe a part of what we believed before, and we take it for granted, that no alteration has taken place, except when we abandon an opinion altogether, and adopt a new one. So certain and immutable is the influence of our immediate feelings on our immediate sentiments, that the French have adopted the word, *sentiment*, to express absolute sensation or corporal feeling. "The soul," says Montesquieu, "acquires knowledge by its ideas and its inward senses or feelings," which latter word he expresses by the term *sentiment*. "*Les nouveaux philosophes*," says a French writer, "*veulent que la couleur soit un sentiment de l'âme*." In this sentence, *sentiment* is evidently used for sensation, or feeling. That this adoption of the word *sentiment*, to express feeling, arose from the inseparable and intimate connexion that exists between our feelings and sentiments, a term which in our language, and in the original Latin from which it is derived, ex-

presses our opinions in general, or more properly, as Professor Stuart explains it, "those complex determinations of the mind which result from the co-operation of our rational powers and of our moral feelings,"—that it arose, I say, from this inseparable connexion, from this powerful influence which our feelings have over our opinions, is rendered still more evident, by the peculiar appropriation of this term, in the French language, to express *love*, which is the strongest of all our feelings, and the most potent in warping and bending to itself all our opinions, and even all our reasonings, which ought to be still more exempt from its control.* The Italians use it also to express opinion as well as feeling; and the Spa-

* Le mot *sentiment* dérivé du primitif Latin *sentire*, a passé dans les langues modernes, mais avec des nuances d'acception particulières à chacun d'elles. En Italien, *sentimento* exprime deux idées différentes; 1. l'opinion qu'on a sur un objet, ou sur un question; 2. la faculté de sentir. En Anglois *sentiment* n'a que le premier de ces deux sens. En Espagnol, *sentiemento* signifie *souffrance*, acception que le mot primitif a quelquefois en Latin.

En François *sentiment* a les deux acceptions de l'Italien, mais avec cette difference, que dans la dernière, il a beaucoup d'extension. Non seulement, il désigne, généralement, en François, toutes les affections de l'âme, mais il exprime plus particulièrement la passion de l'amour. En voici un exemple; *son sentiment est si profond, que rien au monde ne peut la distraire des objets qui servent à le nourir.—Dissertations sur les Gallicismes par M. Suard.*

niards confine it to the sense of suffering. If the English have confined it to the primitive meaning, it is, perhaps, because their opinions are less influenced by their feelings than the French or Italians. Few nations have given reason so complete a dominion over their feelings as the English; and therefore they were not so likely to confound in theory what they distinguished in practice.*

* I am aware how difficult it is to account for those different usages in different nations, which are called different tastes. They are generally the result of many causes co-operating in the production of one effect. If, however, we should be unable to discover more than one cause, and even this a partial one, limited in its influence, and confined in its operations, it is wiser to acknowledge our ignorance, or suspend our opinion, than venture to trace a general effect, or the usage of an entire nation, to so doubtful an origin. The genius of a nation, particularly a nation that possesses a marked and decisive character, will seldom bend to partial influence. Instead of yielding to circumstances, they make circumstances yield to them, unless where they exert not only a strong, but a constant and lasting influence over them. Of all the causes, however, to which we can refer any taste or usage peculiar to a nation, none should be preferred to those which are founded on their national manners and characteristic genius. Those traits of character which a nation possesses in common with no other, are surely the most likely to produce those usages which they adopt in common with no other. A nation will always adopt, with pleasure, whatever is congenial to their character, and always evince a marked antipathy to such customs or usages as are introduced among them by political, religious, or local circumstances, if these usages should be repugnant to their original tempers or cha-

He, then, who judges of beauty by his own feelings, judges by a standard that will be found

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racteristic genius. I am, therefore, inclined to think, that when we trace the particular taste or usage of any nation, not only to a partial, but even to a general cause, which is totally unconnected with the national character or genius of the people, we are apt to be mistaken, unless we can shew, that this cause is powerful enough to force this usage upon them, however naturally averse they may be to its adoption. Of this error, in referring the different tastes of different nations to some partial circumstance, unconnected with the national character of either, Lord Kames affords us an example, in attempting to explain why the French are so rapid, and the English so languid in their pronunciation. "The pronunciation of the genuine language of passion," he says, "is necessarily directed by the nature of the passion, particularly by the slowness or celerity of its progress: plaintive passions, which are the most frequent in tragedy, having a slow motion, dictate a slow pronunciation: in declamation, on the contrary, the speaker warms gradually; and as he warms, he naturally accelerates his pronunciation. But as the French have formed their tone of pronunciation upon Corneille's declamatory tragedies, and the English upon the more natural language of Shakspeare, it is not surprising, that custom should produce such difference of taste in the two nations."* Who but Lord Kames himself could ever imagine, that a Frenchman ever thinks of Corneille, when he stuns us with the rapidity of his expression, or that an Englishman thinks it unbecoming in him to speak fast, because Shakspeare wrote natural language? If we only look to the different characters of the people, we shall soon find a clue to this difference of taste. The Frenchman is all life, feeling, energy, and passion: the Englishman is serene,

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* *Elements of Criticism*, vol. i. p. 458.

frequently at variance with itself; because it will always adapt itself, and conform to every new modification of feeling, produced by times and

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calm, deliberative, and rational. No wonder, then, that the language of the former should keep pace with the rapidity of his genius, and the ardour of his feelings, and that the language of the latter, should mark the serene composure and more tempered energy of his mind. We can always form an opinion of the national character, even of a people with whom we have no acquaintance, from the harshness and asperity, the softness and elegance, the energy and vigour, the copious grandeur or laconic brevity of the language which they speak. If, then, the very genius of a language is determined by the character of the people who speak it, how much more natural is it to refer to this character, the vivacity or coolness, the rapidity or deliberation, with which they speak, than to ascribe them to the influence of two dramatic writers, of whom multitudes in both nations never think, perhaps, twenty times in their life. Both nations only yield to their natural dispositions, when they speak quick or slow. The Frenchman would find himself upon thorns, if he were restricted to the slow and circumspect manner of the Englishman; and the latter would suspect he was losing his senses, if he found himself keeping pace with the rapid loquacity of the Frenchman. Had Lord Kames even confined his observation to the French and English actors, it would still be liable to this objection, that where a more reasonable and probable cause could be assigned, a less probable one should not be adopted; and it is surely more reasonable to ascribe the rapid pronunciation of the French actors to that more general law which governs the nation at large, than to the influence of Corneille's tragedies. To assign one reason for the rapidity of the French actors, and another for that of the nation, is highly unphilosophic. The same observation holds good with regard to our own nation.

situations. The feelings of man are not always in his own power; he perceives, at certain moments, that they possess a certain undue influence over him, which he cannot resist. A little philosophy, however, or, what is still more easily attained, a little common sense, will inform him, that it is unwise to trust to those feelings; that it is unwise to adopt such opinions or sentiments as they suggest to him, clothed in the specious robes of truth and reality; and that it is still more unwise to adopt any line of conduct, or commence any undertaking which they may prompt him to pursue. He will reflect, that he was not always in the habit of thinking as he does now; that, if he did not *feel* as he does, he would not *reason* as he does; and that, when his feelings subside, he will, probably, think otherwise than he does at present. If this man's philosophy, or common sense, teaches him to act rightly in not trusting to his feelings, how much more cautiously should he guard against them, in judging of beauty, where the least prepossession or disturbance of mind is apt to lead him into error. Mr. Hume very justly observes, in his Essay on the "*Standard of Taste*," that "the feelings of man are not always conformable to the rules laid down by criticism. When we would try the force of any beauty or deformity, we must choose with care a proper time and place, and bring the fancy to a suitable situation

and disposition. A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object: if these be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic or universal beauty." And elsewhere he observes, that "though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt." Every individual, therefore, who solely trusts to his own feelings, in judging those of mankind, or in ascertaining how far the object that pleases him is calculated to please all men, is necessarily exposed to error; and unless he has some other means of discovering this common feeling, he can never have any certainty that his taste is elegant, natural, or correct.

But it will be replied, that beauty is founded on feeling; that we know what it is only through the medium of feeling, and that if we view it through any other medium, we must necessarily be mistaken; that though our feelings are sometimes apt to deceive us, they are not so always, and that we must therefore view beauty through our feelings, or give up all hopes of being acquainted with it at all. This doctrine, if properly understood, is undoubtedly true, and by no means at variance with the theory which I want to establish; for though I prefer discussion to feeling, it will be ultimately

found, that discussion, when properly conducted; is ultimately founded on feeling, and that all discussion which draws its conclusions from any other source, however philosophic it may appear, has no concern whatever with the nature of true taste, or the discovery of beauty. Men who discuss or philosophize in this manner, may indeed weaken our pleasures, by denying that to be beautiful which absolutely is so: they may tell us, that we are deluded, when we admire a certain passage in a poem, or a certain figure in a painting, and that the emotions which they produce originate from a vitiated taste; but the moment we prove them to be in error, it will always be found, that their judgments were not ultimately deduced from an acquaintance with the laws of our nature; that they were conclusions derived from that abstract philosophy which is too stubborn to bend to the peculiar and distinct nature of the subject before it, that proudly stands aloof, and while it pretends to an acquaintance with the general laws and phenomena of nature, forgets that it is ignorant of the particular laws which distinguish the particular subject to which it is immediately confined. Satisfied with finding some general analogies between it and other subjects, it draws its conclusions from them, and suffers all those characteristic qualities that exclusively belong to its immediate object, to escape its notice. It is true, indeed, that so far as

the subject before it resembles others, so far as it possesses any qualities in common with them, we are made acquainted with the relation; but this is not always what we seek: we think it of more importance to know in what it differs, than in what it agrees, with other subjects; we wish to know what qualities it has that can be found in no other subject whatever; for it is only this knowledge that can, in a strict sense, make us acquainted with its distinct and proper character; so that, though he who is happy in tracing resemblances may serve to amuse us, it is only he who discovers differences that can add to our stock of information.

As I admit that discussion, when properly conducted, is ultimately founded on feeling, it may be thought unnecessary to distinguish them from each other. The distinction, however, is of such importance, that I apprehend no man can acquire a correct taste who neglects the former, and trusts entirely to the latter. The danger of trusting to our feelings, I have already shewn: it now remains to be explained, in what discussion, in matters of taste, properly consists; how it allies itself to feeling, and draws all its conclusions from an acquaintance with the laws by which these feelings, or to use a more extended and less ambiguous expression, by which the sensitive part of our nature is governed. We shall

afterwards be better enabled to estimate the advantages which it possesses, in deciding on matters of taste; how far its decisions may be depended on; and whether any case may arise, in which it is calculated to mislead our judgment, or diminish our pleasures. It is proper, however, to prefix a few observations on the origin of those feelings on which all true discussion should be founded, and the modes and affections to which they are subject from the action of external being.

Man, as originally constituted by the Author of his existence, is furnished with organs of sensation, and faculties of perception, adapted to the habitation in which he has been placed. Were his senses differently constituted from what they are, the presence of external objects would affect him differently from what they do; or were external objects endowed with properties different from what they possess, they would excite in him sensations different from those which he feels at present, unless a corresponding change took place in his sensations and faculties of perception. If, then, we should suppose nature to remain as it presents itself to us at present, but admit a change in the constitution of our sensitive organs, it is clear that a complete revolution should take place in what we call *taste*. A different style of painting, sculpture, architecture, gardening, &c. would necessarily be adopted, though the universal prin-

ciple that regulates taste would still be the same. The colours in painting, for instance, would be more glaring and brilliant, if our eyes were endowed with less visual power; but if, on the contrary, this visual power were increased, and rendered more acute, the colours in painting would be more softened and mellowed, as they would, in this case, require less brilliancy to produce the same effect. In both cases, however, the universal principle that regulates taste would still be the same, namely, *an adaptation of sensible appearances to the organs by which they are perceived.* This is, at present, the principle by which the fine arts are regulated; and it would still be the principle, whatever alteration or modification should take place in our organs, or in the sensible appearances of external being. This principle which, for its excellency, may be called the maxim of maxims, in matters of taste, is that on which all the principles of all the arts must necessarily hinge. The most unskilful and tasteless artist is as attentive to its presiding spirit as he who combines the utmost felicity of execution with the most exquisite harmony of design. All equally attempt to please, but pleasure can be imparted only by this adaptation of sensible appearances to the sensible faculties by which they are perceived. Hence it is, that whenever a person wishes to give displeasure, he unconsciously sets himself to study not only

the disposition of our faculties, but the harmony that exists between them and external objects; and having attained this knowledge, he produces an effect, or an appearance, contrary to those which he perceives adapted to, or harmonizing with, our organs of sensation. If, however, we were created with different organs, or a different contexture of the organs which we possess, it is possible, that what displeases us now, would then give us pleasure; but it is equally certain, that the means adapted to displease us now, would not then be resorted to. If a blind man's servant wishes to displease him, he may do so by putting a nettle into his hand when he calls for a rose; but he would not have recourse to this means of giving displeasure, if he had not previously known, that the organ of feeling was so constituted as not to relish the sensation excited by the nettle. If, however, the contexture of this organ had been different, the nettle, so far from producing a disagreeable sensation, might produce an emotion of peculiar delight. But had this been the case, the servant would have studied some other means of producing the intended effect.

Nature is then so contrived with regard to us, or we are so contrived with regard to nature, or, more properly speaking, nature and we are mutually so contrived with regard to each other, that certain appearances in nature, are intended by the.

Author of nature to produce certain emotions in us, and no other. If the objects by which we are surrounded, were not intended to produce the same sensations in us, at all times, what gives us pleasure at one moment, might give us displeasure the moment following. The power, however, which we enjoy of being pleased at the presence of certain objects, seems entirely to belong to the object by which the sensation or emotion is produced, so far as it can be considered of an active nature: it is the external object that possesses the active power of exciting the emotion in us: ours is only a passive power, a mere susceptibility of receiving the impression. This susceptibility cannot be considered an active power of co-operating with the external agency of the object; for should we even resist this agency, the impression would notwithstanding be produced. Neither is it active with regard to the nature of the emotion or sensation excited; for if any act of ours could alter the sensations which external objects are of themselves, and without the intervention of any resistance on our part, calculated to excite, it would follow, that every thing we look upon could be rendered a pleasing object. No object would be disagreeable, could we alter, by any active power of ours, the sensation which it was originally calculated to excite. But this, we find, is not the case: disagreeable objects al-

ways produce disagreeable sensations, whether we will it or not; it is not in our power to evade the force of the law by which they affect us, and every thing in nature is pleasing or displeasing, according as they more or less harmonize with the organs which they affect, and which communicate to us the perception of aversion or enjoyment.

I am aware that, in offering this opinion, I oppose myself to the authority of an eminent metaphysical writer, Dr. Reid, who maintains that corporeal objects can make no impression on the mind. "When I look," he says, "upon the wall of my room, the wall does not act at all, nor is capable of acting: the perceiving it is an act or operation in me. That this is the common apprehension of mankind, with regard to perception, is evident, from the manner of expressing it in all languages. It appears, therefore, that this phrase of the mind's having impression, made upon it by corporeal objects in perception, is either a phrase without any distinct meaning, and contrary to the propriety of the English language, or it is grounded upon a hypothesis which is destitute of proof. On that account, though we grant that in perception there is an impression made upon the organ of sense, and upon the nerves and brain, we do not admit that the object makes any impression upon the mind."

This theory, like almost all other theories that

are not founded in truth, contains principles which necessarily confute itself. We are told the wall "does not act at all, nor is capable of acting;" and thence it is concluded, that it can make no impression upon the mind. But if it cannot act at all, all other subjects are as free from any impressions made by it as the mind is, simply because that which cannot act, according to Dr. Reid himself, can make no impression. How then does it happen that it makes an impression on the organ of sense, and upon the nerves and brain? That it makes this impression, is granted by the Doctor, as he admits, that in perception an impression is made on these organs. If, then, the wall can make no impression upon the mind, it is not because it does not act at all, or because it is incapable of making an impression. And this is the only reason assigned for its not making impressions on the mind. But how is it we discover that an impression is made on the nerves and brain, if no impression was made on the mind? The mind could not inform us of the matter, if the impression did not reach itself; and yet we have no means of knowing any thing about impressions, or indeed of knowing any thing at all, but as the mind informs us. Should it be argued, in favour of Dr. Reid's hypothesis, that the mind is an entity, or spirit, totally distinct from the sensitive part of our nature, which merely looks on as a

spectator, and takes no part in the various affections, sensations, and passions which we perceive in ourselves; should it be contended that while it thus perceives all our emotions and impressions, it is subject neither to emotions nor impressions itself, but stands aloof, and communicates to us every thing that takes place within us, I reply that the thing is impossible. My mind cannot inform me, that the paper on which I am writing, makes an impression on my eyes, that the eyes communicate it to the nerves, and the nerves to the brain, but that the impression goes no farther, and reaches not to itself; for unless I feel the impression, it cannot be made, and if I do feel, I require no information from the mind to convince me of it. In like manner, if an impression be made on my tongue, I must feel it, for no impression can be made till it is felt; and if I who feel be different from my mind which does not feel, and on which no impression can be made, it is evident that I have no occasion for the mind, at all, to inform me of my feelings, with which I am already acquainted. It follows, therefore, that as all our knowledge is communicated through the medium of organic impressions, so all our knowledge can be acquired without any assistance from the mind, if these impressions can never reach it. All the impressions made upon my organs, nerves,

and brain, are necessarily made upon me, for if I do not feel these impressions, no suggestions of my mind can convince me that the impressions were made; and, indeed, to talk of an impression that is not felt, is to talk of something which no one can comprehend. If, then, the organic impressions are made upon me, but not upon my mind, I, who feel, and my mind which does not feel, have no communication with each other: we are distinct beings that know nothing of each other; for every thing I know, may be known without consulting my mind, according to Dr. Reid's theory, and therefore the mind must be something which I know nothing about.

The fact, however, is, that I who feel the impressions made upon my organs, nerves, and brain, am the self-same being with my mind; and therefore whatever impressions are made upon me, must necessarily be made upon it. It is also a fact, proved by experiments, that no impressions are made on the sensitive organs at all; it is the mind alone that can feel impressions, as will hereafter be shewn; and the impression which seems to be felt by the fingers, when they touch a solid body, is actually felt by the mind, "it being common," as Mr. Knight observes, "for a person who has lost a limb to imagine that he feels a pain in the extremity which

has been amputated, that is, really to feel a pain excited by some internal cause, similar to that which he had before felt in that extremity."

It is however but fair to let the reader know by what arguments Dr. Reid supports the theory of the mind's receiving no impressions from corporeal objects. "In the most extensive sense," he observes, "an impression is a change produced in some passive subject, by the operation of an external cause. If we suppose an active being to produce any change in itself by its own active power, this is never called an impression upon it. From this it appears, that to give the name of impression to any effect produced in the mind, is to suppose that the mind does not act at all in the production of that effect. If seeing, hearing, desiring, willing, be operations of the mind, they cannot be impressions: if they be impressions, they cannot be operations of the mind. In the structure of all languages they are considered as acts or operations of the mind itself, and the names given them imply this. To call them impressions, therefore, is to trespass against the structure, not of a particular language, but of all languages."*

In shewing the weakness of this argument, I am happy to avail myself of the thoughts of a

* Reid, vol. I. p. 26, 27.

very eminent and critical writer, who was at once the friend and admirer of Dr. Reid—I mean Professor Stuart; and I quote him the more willingly, as I shall have frequent occasions, in the course of this work, to differ with him in opinion. The reader will easily perceive, that Dr. Reid rests his argument solely on the structure of universal language. Professor Stuart, who saw more clearly than Dr. Reid, how little the structure of language is to be depended upon in the philosophical investigation of a question, makes the following observations. In quoting them, I have no hesitation to say, and I say it with pleasure, that they are highly worthy of their author. They point out, in the clearest manner, that nice and accurate distinction that exists between popular and philosophic ideas; and they shew how apt we are to be deceived, when we rest the force of a philosophic argument on the mere structure of language. Having shewn the difficulty attending the origin of words expressive of things which do not fall under the cognizance of our senses, he proceeds, "I cannot help pausing a little to remark, how much more imperfect language is than is commonly supposed, when considered as an organ of mental intercourse. We speak of communicating, by certain words, our ideas and our feelings to others; and we seldom reflect sufficiently on the latitude with which

this metaphorical phrase ought to be understood. Even in conversing on the plainest and most familiar subjects, however full and circumstantial our statements may be, the words which we employ, if examined with accuracy, will be found to be nothing more than to suggest *hints* to our hearers, leaving by far the principal part of the process of interpretation to be performed by the mind itself. In this respect, the effect of *words* bears some resemblance to the *stimulus* given to the memory and imagination by an outline, or a shadow exhibiting the profile of a countenance familiar to the eye. The most minute narratives, accordingly, are by no means, in every instance, the most intelligible and satisfactory, as the most faithful copies after nature do not always form the best portraits. In both cases, the skill of the artist consists in a happy selection of particulars which are *expressive* or *significant*."

"Language, it is commonly said, is the express image of thought; and that it may be said, with sufficient propriety, to be so, I do not dispute, when the meaning of the proposition is fully explained. The mode of expression, however, it ought to be remembered, is figurative, and therefore, when the proposition is assumed as a principle of reasoning, it must not be rigorously or literally interpreted. This has been too often overlooked by writers on the human mind. *Even Dr. Reid*

himself, cautious as he is, in general, with respect to the ground on which he is to build, has repeatedly appealed to this maxim, without any qualification whatsoever; and by thus adopting it agreeably to its letter rather than to its spirit, has been led, in various instances, to lay greater stress on the structure of speech than (in my opinion) it can always bear in a philosophical argument."

The importance, then, which Dr. Reid rests on the structure of language, is not of such weight as he wishes to attach to it. And though to call "seeing, hearing, desiring, willing," impressions, should even be found to "trespass against the structure of all languages," it would not however follow, that it trespassed against those philosophical deductions, which regard the spirit rather than the letter, the reality rather than the appearances of things.

All objects in nature are therefore endowed with properties, stimuli, or causes, which excite in us certain sensations or emotions, which may be called their effects. We are the subjects on which these causes act, and in which the effect is produced; and so immutably are these causes and effects linked together, that wherever the former have a subject to act upon, the latter are immediately produced. Every object we look upon, produces an instantaneous sensation, which is found to be agreeable or disagreeable in its own nature.

Two things, however, are necessary, to know whether any object be pleasing or displeasing: the first, that we should direct our attention to the object itself, and not suffer the mind to be engaged by any other subject of contemplation; the second, that we should attend to our feellings, at the time. When the mind is strongly engaged in the contemplation of any object, it is sometimes apt to forget whether it feels pleased or not. The pleasure, indeed, is not the less sensibly felt, at the moment; but if it be suddenly called away by a matter of great interest and importance, it is doubtful whether it can ever afterwards tell how it felt affected at the time. There are some, however, whose organs are so blunt, that if even asked, at the time, they can scarcely tell whether the emotion which they feel be an agreeable or disagreeable one: the only sensation they feel is the presence of the object. Such are those half-organized souls who grope through life more asleep than awake. They cannot, it is true, resist altogether the force of external impressions: neither can the ass; if you attempt to strike him with a stick, he perceives your intention, but he will not stir—he will stoop his head, or turn it aside, but the rest of his body remains as fixed as a statue. So it is with men who neither feel nor pay attention to the

impressions of external objects: they feel the impression, indeed, more or less; but they pass on, and take no more heed. An object must be extremely disagreeable that gives them any uneasiness, and it must be extremely beautiful if it excite their attention so far as to distinguish it from other objects. Hence they scarcely make any distinction between men in the commerce of civil life: if they apprehend no danger of being robbed or murdered, they seldom take into account any other qualities of those with whom they associate. As to delicacy of passion, or delicacy of feeling, they are utter strangers to either, and it would be difficult to make them form even a faint conception of what is meant by the terms. I am not, however, of opinion, that such men are incapable of being warmed to the most enthusiastic raptures, and of feeling whatever the most exquisite and refined sensibility is capable of feeling. To produce such an effect, however, the qualities of external being, should possess a sort of electric stimulus that would rouse them, whether they willed it or not, from their native lethargy, and, as it were, awaken them into actual, and positive existence. One electric shock would not be sufficient to produce the desired effect: they must be continually electrified, or the natural inertness of their constitution would soon drag

them back to their native lethargy. If it should be asked, why has not nature accommodated herself to such men? why are not sensible objects endowed with properties fitted to stimulate them to the enjoyment of real and absolute happiness? the answer is obvious, that such qualities of matter as would prevent such men from slumbering through life, would awake into more than mortal rapture the mind of those whose sympathies, sensibilities, and affections are already exquisitely attuned to the present order of nature. What would be the feelings and the ecstasies of him whose heart and affections are even now feelingly alive to each fine impulse, whose

> "—eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The form of things unknown—
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."

What, I say, would be the feelings of such a man, if the fine impulses of nature had been still finer, still more exquisitely contrived, or more poignantly stimulating? But though neither beauty nor deformity can sensibly affect these dormant spirits, we are not thence to infer, that these beauties do not act upon them with as much force as they do on the most susceptible minds: the effects or emotions produced are,

indeed, widely different, but the moment of the exciting cause is always the same.

That these inert and dormant spirits might be wakened into rapture and enthusiasm; that they might discover not only talent and genius, but even equal, or surpass, the glowing ardour, and rapid impetuosity of Homer, the philosophic grandeur and epic majesty of Virgil, or even the terrific pomp and sublime magnificence of Milton, appears to me not only possible, but certain, if external influence only co-operated to produce the effect. In the extent of the mental powers, no difference can be traced between ordinary intellect and the most exalted genius; and all have the same senses through which ideas are derived, though they may be more exquisitely prepared for their respective offices in some people than in others. If, then, all have the same genus of spirit, what creates a difference, but that exquisite adaptation of the sensitive organs, in some people, to receive impressions from without, which is denied to others? Sensibility and imagination are the parents of taste and genius, of poetry and eloquence, of whatever is marked with the characters of greatness and sublimity, of invention and design, of might and energy, in the walks of literature and science. But sensibility and imagination are themselves derived from a quick and lively

feeling, an instantaneous susceptibility of emotions from the impulses of external objects. Sensibility is affected by the object when present, imagination by the mental image which the mind forms of it afterwards. It is then only those who are "feelingly alive to each fine impulse" that can possess, in an eminent degree, either sensibility or imagination; but if any means could be devised of rousing those less active spirits, and of animating them with the same lively, glowing, and ardent feelings, I see no reason why they might not possess the same sensibility and imagination; and why this possession should not communicate to them the same fire of genius which it has imparted to others. To produce such an effect, those qualities of sensible and intellectual being by which we are apt to be affected, should possess a more stimulating power than they do at present. Such a change in the constitution of external being would, I apprehend, confer genius and taste on the lowest order of intellect, without the slightest alteration in the present contexture of the sensitive organs, except where some physical imperfection exists, that belongs as little to stupid men as to men of talent. All that slow capacities want, is to be roused from their lethargy, to make them look around them, and feel as they ought to feel, and I doubt not if some great and sudden change took place

in the life of a man who never evinced the least talent or genius, but it would produce, in some degree, what only more stimulating powers in external being could completely effect. Such a change, however, might elicit energies and capacities of which no one ever thought him capable, provided the nature of the change which took place rendered the exercise of these powers absolutely necessary. How many instances have there been of men who grew up to manhood, without evidencing the slightest pretensions to genius or talent;—whose feelings, blunted by the iron grasp of adversity, so far from testifying the soft and complying mould of which they were composed, by yielding to the finer impulses of nature, obstinately resisted those very sympathies and sensibilities which were most congenial to their heart; but who afterwards, when a change of life gave existence to new feelings, and new modes of being affected by external influence, arose to a proud and elevated rank, not only in literary attainments, but in mental powers. Had they always remained in their original state, they would have still passed for men of confined and narrow parts, because they would always want that quick perception of the slightest impulse, which is the parent of sensibility and imagination; and whoever is destitute of these, particularly the former, must be always content to pass

through life, unnoticed and unknown in the walks of literature and science.

Whatever, then, supplies a man with feeling, will, I am strongly inclined to think, supply him with that basis on which genius erects her colossean form. But in proportion to the original inertness of the feeling, the stimulus applied to it should be proportionably increased. Nor would there be more wanting, in my opinion, to give genius to a dunce. He differs in no other respect from a man of genius: to make him feel is to make him perceive, and to make him perceive is to give him all that distinguishes genius from all other orders of intellect. A slight examination of the difference that prevails in the various gradations of intellect, will render this more evident. A man of talent differs from a man of genius only in not *feeling* so exquisitely, and consequently in not *perceiving* so distinctly. To feel is to perceive; or if feeling differ from perception, it is only as the cause differs from the effect. But as there can be no effect without a cause, so neither can there be a perception without feeling. All our perceptions are communicated through the medium of feeling, though having once felt and perceived any truth, it is not necessary, as I have already observed, that the feeling should afterwards accompany the perception. It may, or may not, and I believe in most abstract subjects it seldom does, which is, perhaps, the chief cause

that renders them so dry and uninteresting. Montesquieu, indeed, extends our feelings to abstract perceptions, as well as to those of immediate sensation; but, though the most abstract idea must enter originally through the medium of feeling, yet the feelings which attend it whenever it recurs afterwards, are too slight to make a sensible impression. "We suppose," he says, "a total difference between ideas and feelings; yet it is certain that the soul *feels* whatever it *perceives*, and there are no subjects so abstrusely intellectual which it does not perceive in reality or in fancy, and which, of consequence, it does not feel."* If, then, there be no real difference between the man of talent and the man of genius, but what arises from different degrees of susceptibility or of feeling, it is clear that the man of talent has no advantage over the man of ordinary capacity, but what arises from the same cause; and it is still to more lively feelings that the latter owes whatever advantage he possesses over the man of slow capacity, or the absolute dunce. Whatever, then, could sharpen or invigorate the feelings of a man of talent, whatever could make him equally as susceptible of every impulse, as the man of genius, must give him all the advantages that genius possesses over him; and if this redeeming means were extended with additional

* See Appendix, No. 1.

degrees of force to all the subordinate orders of intellect down to the dunce, or if, in other words, the stimulus of external impulses were always proportioned to the native inertness of our sensitive organs, all gradations of intellect would cease; the energies, capacities, sensibilities, and applications of all men, would be alike; because whatever slowness or languor was caused by the original inertness of the organs of some people, would be compensated by the irritation of the stimulus that forced it into action.

If this doctrine be true, it follows, that the most exalted genius possesses no advantage, as to original powers of mind, over the slowest intellect;—that he does not possess, as is generally imagined, a purer genus of spirit operating on the sensitive organs; that the spirit which animates and informs both, is the same; and that the pre-eminence of the man of genius consists in a more exquisite adaptation of his sensitive organs to the impulses of sensible objects. This, it is true, may humble the pride of genius, by bringing it on a level with the herd of mankind; but if it be a truth, there can be no good reason for keeping it secret: it will teach men of genius to estimate still more highly that exquisite structure of organs from which they derive their strength*; and it will encourage men of no genius, to rouse themselves

* See Appendix, No. 2.

from their native lethargy, to vellicate the obduracy of their sensitive organs, to soften and bend them by continual exercise to those purposes for which they were intended by nature, to prevent them from slumbering in apathy or indolence, and, as they have the same genus of spirit operating upon them that wafted the Mæonian bard to such daring flights, to aspire to that distinction which they are capable of attaining, if they can only bend, twist, and adapt these tardy and stubborn mediums of perception to the impulse continually exercised over them by external objects. It is this continual exercise, this bending, or twisting of the organs, if I may so express myself, which gives that refined ease, elegance, and polish to the mind, that banishes the native ferocity of uncultivated nature, which

Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.

Those who maintain that genius consists in a purer genus of spirit, an original excellence of the soul, that makes it differ even in essence from vulgar minds, should be prepared to shew, that men of sublime capacities can write what men of ordinary capacities cannot understand, however well instructed they may be, and however well acquainted with the terms which they make use of. But I suspect, that no passage can be met with in the writings of Homer, Virgil, or Milton,

of Newton, Locke, or Descartes, but the generality of mankind are capable of comprehending, if they are properly instructed in that antecedent knowledge which is necessary to every man who would understand it perfectly. He, then, who understands whatever a man of genius can write, must certainly be allowed to extend his ideas as far as his, and to comprehend whatever he is capable of comprehending. The only difference is, that he would never understand or comprehend it, if his attention had not been directed to it by the former; not, however, for want of capacity, or powers of mind, but because his feelings would have never led him to travel in the same direction. The impulses were too slight to act upon them, or rather, they were too gross to respond to the impulses. The minds of both are therefore the same: but the structure of their sensitive organs is essentially different. Hence it is, that a learned man, suppose a fellow of Oxford or Cambridge, who has an extended acquaintance with all the sciences, but no pretensions to genius, can discern very little when he converses with a man of genius, that distinguishes him from himself, except the enlightened ardour, and glowing energy of his feelings. He does not perceive him elicit any truth, which he finds any difficulty in understanding; he even prefers his own judgment to his, on many occasions; but, though he finds

no difficulty in understanding him, and is therefore apt to admire him the less, he can easily perceive, if he only attend to his manner of investigation, that he is continually travelling out of that common and beaten path which is generally pursued by others, and which he would pursue himself, if treating on the same subject; for knowing all that others had said before on it, he would only repeat their arguments, often perhaps in the same words. He finds that he pays little attention to what others have said or written on the subject before, because he has not filled his head with common-place extracts. Having seized the spirit of every writer whom he had read, by the exquisite susceptibility and tenacity of his *feelings*, he brings only this spirit with him into company, and, guided by its presiding influence, he treats every subject as if he had never read a word concerning it in any author. For, in the first place, he forgets every thing, as well words as ideas, in these writers that was not worth retaining, and so far he is ignorant of them: in the second place, whatever he has retained, consists in ideas and not in words. He knows not a sentence, not a word in the authors whom he has read from beginning to end, except such passages as strongly attracted his attention, and where he was at a loss which most to admire, the felicity of the expression, or the beauty of the sentiment. He

therefore treats of every subject in conversation, as if he had never read or treated of it before, because he follows the guidance of his own genius, and often expresses the sentiments of others when he thinks they are his own. In all the arguments, however, which he advances, his learned friend can perceive nothing difficult to be understood: and though he is obliged to acknowledge that he has said many things new, that he has pursued his subject through all its involutions with a facility and rapidity of which he knows himself incapable, and that even when he had to defend old truths, that were often defended before, many of his arguments were new, though not less logical and conclusive than those advanced by others, yet he cannot persuade himself, that in powers of understanding he has any advantage over himself, and therefore, perhaps, admires him less after this conversation, than when he only knew him through the medium of his writings. The fact is, that a man of the sublimest genius cannot extend the powers of his comprehension farther than learned men in general can: they can understand whatever he can understand, but he must always lead the way: he must make the discovery, but having once made it, they are often as good judges of its truth as he is himself. He has, therefore, no advantage of mind over them. His only superiority consists in pursuing and discovering truths where

he has only the slightest clue to guide him. This superiority he owes to the exquisite susceptibility of his feelings, which yields to the slightest impulse. So slight a clue would escape, or rather, would make no impression on grosser feelings; but when once the truth to which it led is unravelled, they can perceive it as clearly as he who first unfolded the intellectual maze that led to its discovery. A greyhound cannot trace a hare by the scent, but if he sees him, he knows as well as the hound, that he is a proper object of pursuit. If the hound, however, had not the sagacity to trace him out and start him, it is doubtful whether the greyhound would have ever stumbled upon him. It is so, if not with the generality of mankind, at least with the generality of literary men: they are a species of greyhounds in literary pursuits; they are eager for their game, slow in discovering it, but when once it is discovered, they can immediately tell as well as the discoverer, whether it be the proper object of which they are in pursuit.

But whether the different degrees of intellect originate or not from different degrees of feeling or sensibility, it is certain, that all the varieties of taste, and therefore all the disputes relative to the beauty of objects, have their origin in that source. When any natural object, as a rose, a violet, or a lily, excites a pleasing emotion in all

men by its appearance, all men agree to call that which excites the emotion, by the term, *beautiful*. Here there is no dispute; all are determined by feeling, and yet no reason can be assigned, why the feeling or emotion of beauty is excited. So far, then, from preferring discussion to feeling, in judging of the beauty of such an object, we cannot have recourse to discussion at all. Discussion can take place only where a reason can be assigned, and if we can assign no reason why we delight in looking on a rose, what arguments can we resort to in attempting to discuss it? If, however, any reason could be assigned for the pleasing emotion excited by a rose, this reason, and the discussion founded upon it, so far from lessening our pleasure, would only serve to render it more agreeable and delightful. If reason could supply us with arguments to prove demonstratively, in what manner this pleasure arose from certain qualities which the Creator of our being had annexed to the rose, and by what laws these qualities were calculated to increase our happiness whenever we observed them, the conviction that our Creator adopted this means of affording us delight, must surely serve to increase the pleasure which the rose would have afforded us without this knowledge. Pleasure, so far from being lessened by knowing that it is rational, is always increased by the reflection of its being so.

The gratifications afforded us by illicit pleasures are always lessened, and sometimes turned into absolute pain, by the reflection that they are indulged at the expense of reason and virtue. How much sweeter it is to indulge natural pleasures—those pleasures against the enjoyment of which no rational argument can be advanced, even when reason is unable to give a rigid demonstration of the sources from which they have originated, than to indulge pleasures equally hostile to reason and to virtue, will appear from the following inimitable contrast which Goldsmith has drawn between these two sources of human happiness. After dwelling with that enthusiasm that belongs only to minds fraught with an exquisite sensibility of heart, on the enjoyment of natural pleasures, he exclaims,

> Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
> These simple blessings of the lowly train;
> *To me more dear, congenial to my heart,*
> *One native charm, than all the gloss of art!*
> Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,
> The soul adopts and owns their first-born sway;
> Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,
> Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined;
> But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,
> With all the freaks of wanton wealth array'd,
> *In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,*
> *The toiling pleasure sickens into pain:*
> And e'en while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
> *The heart, distrusting, asks if this be joy?*

To be able to assign a reason for our pleasures, then, or at least, to have an innate conviction that they are not opposed to reason, would always give them an additional zest; and whenever it is possible to discover such a reason, it is our duty to do so, not only because it gives a more lively relish to the pleasure for whose origin it accounts, but also, because it extends our acquaintance with the benevolence of that uncreated Wisdom by which we are governed, and by whom it has been prepared for us. In accounting, however, for the pleasure afforded by looking on a rose, or any other vegetable production, universally acknowledged to be beautiful, no reason can be assigned, but that we are originally so constituted, that certain objects, possessing certain qualities, are calculated to give us delight. With regard, then, to objects that are universally pleasing, no reason can be assigned but what I have now mentioned; and therefore, the beauty of which D'Alembert speaks, and in judging of which he prefers feeling to discussion, must be of a different character; namely, it must be that species of beauty, in judging of which it is possible to have recourse to discussion. Before I examine what species of beauty this can be, it may be proper to observe, that what I have here advanced regarding that beauty which is universally acknowledged, is equally applicable to that species of

ugliness of which no man forms a doubt, and at the presence of which all men acknowledge themselves to be disagreeably moved. We can assign no reason why an object excites in us a painful emotion, or why we wish it out of our presence; and therefore, when all men acknowledge an object to be ugly, without being able to assign a reason for it, no recourse can be had to discussion in proving it destitute of beauty. With regard, then, to objects which all mankind pronounce agreeable or disagreeable, no reason can be assigned for the emotion which they excite, and from the pleasing or displeasing nature of which they take the name of beautiful or ugly; and therefore, when we talk of discussion in matters of taste, we deceive ourselves if we imagine such objects can become subjects of philosophical investigation. If, then, there be any other objects, in which discussion can take place, they must be such objects as appear pleasing to some people and displeasing to others; for if no difference of opinion prevail, they must possess that character of beauty or ugliness for which, as I have already observed, no reason can be assigned. All objects, therefore, concerning the beauty or ugliness of which the suffrages of mankind seem to be divided, must possess the elements of beauty and ugliness at the same moment; for if no element of ugliness were there, all men would, as in the former

instance, pronounce it beautiful; and if no element of beauty could be traced in it, they would be equally agreed as to its ugliness. Wherever, then, the elements of beauty and ugliness are mingled together in an object, there is fair room for discussion, because it then remains to be decided, which of these elements predominate, particularly when they are nearly on a balance. I believe there are few, if any, objects in nature or in art, in which there is not a mixture of these elements, and so far, it might be thought, there is room for discussion, in determining the beauty of any object; but this, we find, is not the case, for when the elements of ugliness are so few in number, and, what is of more importance in determining the matter, so slight and imperceptible in their nature, as to escape attention, the object will appear beautiful to all men. And *vice versa.* Men, then, differ in determining the beauty or ugliness of an object only when the elements of both are nearly mixed in an equal proportion, or where the multitude of the elements on one side is nearly, or as some may imagine, more than balanced, by the striking and prominent character of the fewer elements on the other. When this happens, a difference of opinion will necessarily ensue; and when it does ensue, there is always room for discussion, because it remains to be decided on what side the balance of beauty or

deformity lies. To object to discussion in such instances, appears to me not to savour of sound philosophy, for this obvious reason. If the elements of beauty that enter into any object are extremely minute, they will be apt to escape the observation of grosser perceptions, and they will, accordingly, pronounce the object destitute of beauty, because their attention is totally engrossed by the more palpable and obvious elements of ugliness. Can any thing, then, be more certain than that, if they judge of such an object by their feelings, they will be mistaken, because their feelings were excited only by those striking and palpable qualities that caught their attention at the first moment, and because their judgment was founded on the emotion excited by this inaccurate observation? Does not reason, then, inform us, that when any of these elements escape their notice, they are subject to error in the judgment which they pronounce, though it is their feelings that lead them into it. The fact, however, is, that it is not feeling that misleads them, but the want of feeling. Had their feelings been more ethereally alive, more capable of discriminating the *tout ensemble* of the qualities which the object presented to them, they would have judged differently, so that their error was not the result of feeling, but of want of feeling; and I doubt not but I shall be able to shew in another

work, which I intend writing on the subject, that *want of feeling*, or inert feeling, is not only the source of that amazing inequality of talent which distinguishes the philosopher from the clown, but also the source of all the errors that have bewildered learning, and kept science in chains. That the want of feeling, which is strictly an incapacity for discriminating all the qualities which an object presents, is apt to mislead our judgment, not only agrees with reason, but is confirmed by experience. Many objects that are at first disagreeable, become pleasing afterwards, when those qualities which first escaped our notice, have time to make themselves observed; and if they were shewn or pointed out to us before we pronounced judgment at first, we should have come to a very different conclusion. If, however, we are left to ourselves, we may remain of the first opinion a considerable time, because it may be a considerable time before we can descry what escaped us at first. To what other reason can we ascribe the revolution that takes place in our judgments from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age? An object which seemed to present only a certain assemblage of qualities in our youth, appears possessed of many more when we increase in years, when experience has extended our acquaintance with things, and reason given us a habit of closer attention to every sensible and in-

tellectual object. But the process of observation is not yet completed. After priding ourselves in the detection of old errors, and the discovery of new truths, and smiling at the confidence of inexperienced youth; after flattering ourselves with an opinion that, so far as our knowledge extends, it possesses all that certainty which reason can enable us to attain, we find, that reason and observation have not still done their utmost, that we still continue to perceive something in objects which we never noticed before, and that the corrections which we made in the errors of our youth, only led us nearer to that *truth* which is incapable of a change. This revolution of judgment is not, however, experienced by all men, because some men, after entertaining an opinion for some length of time, think it impious to change it; and shutting their eyes to conviction, they reduce these opinions into so many maxims, or universal principles of reasoning, on which they afterwards erect the most visionary systems of belief that can possibly find credence in a mind where any twilight of sense remains. No precaution of ours can entirely secure us from the dominion of error; but he alone takes the safest way to guard against it, who never flatters himself that nothing remains in an object which he has not discerned, and who, therefore, suspends his judgment where he has not attained the highest evidence which reason

and observation can afford. The less we extend our knowledge, the more our little circle of information is mingled with error.

> A little learning is a dangerous thing;
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
> There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
> But drinking largely sobers us again.

If, then, the elements of beauty or ugliness, in any object, be so minute as to escape the observation of those whose feelings are not sufficiently exquisite to descry them, there remains no possible way of forming a proper judgment on the subject, but that of a longer and a stricter attention to the object; or, what is equally the same, that of being guided by the judgment of those who have examined it closer and longer than we have done. This is strictly and rigidly *discussion;* for if, after longer and closer attention, many things appear to us in an object which escaped us at first, it is evident, that what we perceived afterwards was the result of closer investigation; and if these qualities are shewn to us at first by a person who had frequently and attentively considered the object himself, the knowledge we obtain through him is equally the result of discussion; for though we perceive them the moment they are shewn to us, the person who points them out owes his own knowledge of them to discussion. This discussion, however, as I have

observed, at the commencement, is founded on feeling; for our first error in not discovering the latent qualities that inhered in the object, arose from want of feeling, that is, from want of that delicate and refined sense which descries, in a moment, the minuter elements of grace and beauty. This want of feeling was supplied by viewing the object more attentively, examining it more closely, and at length descrying those qualities which a more lively and poignant feeling would have descried at first. Having descried them, however, through this close investigation, we become sensible of them; that is, they awake in us the proper sensations which they are calculated to excite. These sensations are our feelings, which, when elevated to a certain tone, are called emotions, but become passions when they proceed to an actual desire of enjoyment. Our last judgment, then, is founded on a more exquisite feeling than the first, though it is the result of strict investigation and discussion; so that every judgment of beauty that is founded on discussion, has the advantage both of discussion and feeling at the same time; for the result of the discussion is to produce a finer feeling than we possessed at first.

It is therefore evident, that D'Alembert, when he tells us, that feeling should be preferred to discussion, maintains, in reality, that the first

gross feeling which the object excites in us, is more chaste, more to be depended upon, and produces a clearer perception of beauty, than that correct and delicate feeling which is ultimately awakened in us by discussion; for all our subsequent feelings and perceptions of beauty are strictly the result of discussion, comparison, investigation, &c.; or, if they be not, discussion has no meaning when applied to subjects of taste, and it will be impossible to point out any perception of beauty that is derived from discussion at all. As D'Alembert had evidently too refined a taste of his own to suppose the first feeling produced by an object, to be the most correct and delicate, it is evident, that he mistook the proper nature of discussion, in matters of taste, and confounded it with that abstract reasoning which carries us entirely away from the subject before us, into speculations that are foreign to the one in question. Discussion, when ultimately founded on feeling, and deducing all its conclusions from premises reducible to feeling alone, so far from misleading us in judging of the beauty or ugliness of any object, only renders us more critical and elegant judges of these opposite qualities of matter; but discussion, resting its judgments on any other laws of our nature, is mere declamation, and as far removed from that discussion which is entirely guided by the proper and distinct nature of

its subject, as reasoning is from reason. The greatest enthusiast thinks he has reason on his side whenever he has recourse to reasoning; an error which *Moliere* humorously exposes when he makes Chrysale say,

> *Raisonner est l'emploi de toute ma maison,*
> *Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison.*

Discussion, then, properly understood, only serves to render us more intimately acquainted with all the qualities of an object, and consequently awakens feelings in us which would have ever lain dormant. Possessed of these feelings, we are endowed with a more enlarged and more enlightened perception, which renders us more critical and elegant judges of the matter on which we are called to decide. This new information, however, which discussion imparts, so far from altering the first impression that an object made on us, only serves to confirm it, when the impression is just; but when the impression is erroneous, discussion enables us to perceive, that many things in the object escaped our attention at first; that our feelings were not quick enough to communicate to us every thing in it which was calculated to affect them, and that a more experienced judge, namely, a judge who had himself recourse to discussion often before, would have formed a different judgment from what we did, the moment he

looked upon it. Thus it is that almost all the beauties of musical expression are lost upon men who are unacquainted with the theory of music, or little accustomed to hear musical performances. When such men hear, for the first time, a difficult piece of music, they are little affected by it, or, if they feel any emotion, it is one of pain and uneasiness; for we always experience a sense of uneasiness when our expectations are disappointed, and, as we naturally seek for pleasure in music, we as naturally feel disappointed when this pleasure is not enjoyed. If, then, according to D'Alembert, such men were to judge by their feelings alone, and reject discussion, they would all be mistaken, unless it be maintained, that there are no beauties in harmony, but what the greater part of mankind are capable of discerning, as soon as it is heard. If so, those who are skilled in music, and who not only feel the emotion but discern the latent beauties that lie concealed from the uninitiated, are the mere dupes of imagination; they are affected by beauties that have no existence but in their own minds. He who would advance such an argument against all the beauties of harmony, which he could neither feel nor discern himself, would soon become an advocate for the very beauties which he laboured to explode, if he once became a proficient in the art. But it does not require to become a professor of music

to discover charms in a tune, which at first seemed devoid of all charms. If it be frequently played, we shall soon begin to relish it more and more, though we still remain ignorant of all the principles of melody, and of all those harmonic relations in sounds which were originally observed in the composition of the tune. This truth, though in direct opposition to D'Alembert's theory, is acknowledged by himself. "How often," he says, "has it happened, that a piece of music, which we have heard for the first time without any agreeable emotion, has excited afterwards in us the most ecstatic raptures, when, by its being often repeated, the ear has been at length able to distinguish its complicated charms, and to perceive the whole delicacy and force of its expression."

But it will, no doubt, be replied, that this beauty is entirely artificial,—that we are pleased with a tune that originally gave us no pleasure, just as we are with a new fashion in dress, which seldom pleases till we are for some time accustomed to it; and that such beauty is consequently of an arbitrary nature. I must confess, that D'Alembert himself acknowledges that this subsequent pleasure, which we derive from a musical composition which was at first heard with indifference, "is a striking instance of the force of habit;" but this acute philosopher was too well acquainted with the laws of our nature to admit, that it was

therefore arbitrary, though he does not attempt to shew by what immutable principle in the nature of things, the force of habit reconciles it to us. I am, however, strongly inclined to think, that he was mistaken in attributing it to the force of habit at all. An eminent performer, as Handel, would have perceived its beauties at once. It would not be necessary to play it a second time, to excite that train of rapturous emotions which only frequent repetitions of it could excite in others. If, on the other hand, a musical composition could not produce this pleasing emotion in the mind of a performer, the moment he heard it, neither length of time, nor force of habit, could ever render it agreeable to him, nor even to those who were displeased with it at first. Hence, then, it is obvious, that if it did not contain real and intrinsic beauties, the influence of habit could never render it agreeable; whereas, if habit alone produced the effect, this effect would necessarily take place, if it were totally destitute of all the united charms of harmony and melody.

To prefer feeling to discussion, therefore, in the discrimination of beauty, is to resign the only medium through which it is possible to acquire a correct and elegant taste; and D'Alembert, in sanctioning such an error, was evidently led away by a popular prejudice entertained against any

interference on the part of reason and philosophy, in subjects of taste and feeling. This prejudice, no doubt, arose from that morose hostility which philosophizing moralists, or to speak more clearly, which writers who have industriously laboured to conceal their misanthropy under the imposing air and garb of a philosophic diction, have evinced against the indulgence of the most rational and the most natural enjoyments. But true philosophy, which is only another name for right reason, will never offer any opinion on subjects of taste, but what is founded on feeling; and, indeed, nothing could be easier, than to shew the futility of arguments or judgments derived from any other source.

Of this truth D'Alembert himself gives us a beautiful illustration, and in which, contrary to the fundamental principle which he laid down to decide all disputes regarding beauty, he clearly evinces, that it is not philosophy or discussion, but a species of false metaphysical reasoning, that leads us into error, in matters of taste. "There is," he says, "an error into which the philosophical critic is more liable to fall, and to avoid which he must consequently employ his principal attention. This error consists in applying to the peculiar objects of taste, principles which, though true in themselves, yet have no relation to these

objects. Every one is acquainted with those lines in the tragedy of the Horatii,

> *Que vouliez vous qu'il fit contre trois? Qu'il mourût.*
> *Ou qu'un beau desespoir alors le securût?*

The heroic expression of the aged father, *Qu'il mourût*, has been justly and universally admired, and the following verse as justly and universally condemned; and yet the common principles of metaphysics will furnish arguments, or rather sophisms, to justify this verse against all the rules of true taste. It will be alleged, for instance, that this second verse is necessary to express all the feelings that passed in the mind of the old Horatius; for though it was his duty to prefer the death of his son to a life of dishonour, yet it was still more natural to wish, that his son might escape by the means of his valour; and, that animated by a *noble despair*, he might stand alone against his three adversaries, and return victorious from the combat. This defence, however plausible upon metaphysical principles, is absolutely misapplied in the case before us, where the question is not concerning the mere expression of truth and nature, but concerning such expressions of both as are striking and sublime. According to the reasoning of the metaphysical critic, the second verse, as it contains the sentiment that is the most natural of the two, should have preceded

the first, which, by that means, would have lost the greatest part of its force. Besides, nothing is more feeble, flat, and frigid, than this second verse, even when restored to its true and natural place. For where is the necessity of the old Horatius's expressing the desire which that verse contains? Will not every one suppose, without difficulty, that it would have been infinitely more rejoicing to him to have seen his son living and crowned with victory, than falling a victim to the superior force of his enemies? The poet, then, had no occasion to express a desire which every one must suppose. The only sentiment which suited that violent state of emotion in which the venerable old man now was, the only affection which was proper to be discovered upon such an occasion, and in circumstances where the glory of his country and of his name were immediately concerned, was that heroic courage which engaged him to choose for his son a noble death, rather than a life of dishonour and infamy."

In this criticism, D'Alembert himself renders it manifest, that it is not philosophy or discussion that leads us into error, but that false, abstract reasoning, which judges by principles that are not at all applicable to the subject which it investigates; while that true philosophy, which deduces all its judgments, in matters of taste, from the laws of feeling and sensibility alone, so far from

misguiding us, only enables us to expose and detect the fallacy of those abstract principles, which impose upon us by the glare of a brilliant but delusive reasoning. Is it not discussion and true philosophy that enabled D'Alembert to expose the false metaphysical reasoning that would attempt to justify the good taste of the verse which he has here censured? And has he not founded this discussion entirely on the laws of sensibility and feeling? I doubt, however, if the line which he has shewn to be dictated by a false taste, were as natural as he allows it to be, whether true criticism or true philosophy could afterwards censure it. He says, "The question is not concerning the mere expression of *truth* and *nature*, but concerning such expressions of both as are *striking* and *sublime*." If this observation be true, it follows, that a sentiment may be striking and sublime, without being either true or natural; and that the critic, consequently, should not take offence at any deviations from truth and nature, while the sentiment which he examines is striking and sublime. With this part of D'Alembert's criticism I cannot agree, believing as I do, that no sentiment can be sublime, which is not, at the same time, true and natural; though I am willing to grant that a sentiment may be true and natural without being sublime. He who attempts sublimity, where the true and proper nature of

the subject will not permit him, deals only in bombast and the false sublime. I am, therefore, unwilling to admit any exception to the rule which *Pope* lays down, in his "Essay on Criticism:"

> *First follow nature, and your judgment frame*
> *By her just standard, which is still the same;*
> *Unerring nature still divinely bright,*
> *One clear, unchanged and universal light,*
> *Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,*
> *At once the source, and end, and test of art.*

Of the universal application of this golden rule I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter; at present I will only observe that if the line—

> *Ou qu'un beau desespoir alors le securût—*

were true and natural, it would not be subject to *D'Alembert's* censure; for though I grant a sentiment may be true, and yet better omitted than expressed, I cannot grant this omission proper when it is *natural* as well as true. To express a sentiment when it ought not to be expressed, is by no means natural, even though it be true; for, as Horace expresses it, *nunc non erat his locus*: its being natural is what determines the propriety of expressing it when it is true. While I am, therefore, willing to admit that the verse which D'Alembert censures, is devoid of beauty, I admit it on very different grounds, namely, be-

cause I consider it to be neither true nor natural, though he grants it to be both one and the other, and adds, "Will not every one suppose without difficulty, that it would have been infinitely more rejoicing to him to have seen his son, living and crowned with victory, than falling a victim to the superior force of his enemies?" This by no means proves the line in question to be either true or natural, for the question is not what would have given him most pleasure, but what thought or sentiment would most naturally arise in his mind when the messenger informed him, that his son was flying from the three *Horatii;* and this sentiment evidently was, *qu'il mourût.* A soul like his, fired with patriotism and the love of glory, could indulge no second thought, when he was informed of his son's cowardice. It could not therefore be either true or natural to put a sentiment into his mouth, which, under such circumstances, would never occur to him; and if it could once be shewn, that the subsequent thought, which is here censured, would naturally arise in his mind, no just criticism could afterwards censure Corneille for giving it expression. It is obvious, then, that though D'Alembert's delicacy of feeling pointed out to him, that this second verse was not dictated by good taste, the arguments by which he endeavours to support his judgment are illogical and incorrect; for this

verse, so far from containing, as he says, "the sentiment that is the most natural of the two," contains, in fact, a sentiment that is not natural at all. Under other circumstances, it might be so, but the rules of just criticism regard only the immediate situation or relation of things from which a sentiment is supposed to arise. And, indeed, D'Alembert himself acknowledges, in the subsequent part of his criticism, that the sentiment *qu'il mourût* was the only one "which suited that violent state of emotion in which the venerable old man was placed,"—an acknowledgement which, of itself, proves that the verse which he censures wants that character of truth and nature which he ascribes to it.

The error of preferring sentiment or feeling, according to D'Alembert, to reasoning and discussion, will indeed, appear of itself, by simply putting the question, how will sentiment or feeling be able to determine whether this line in the tragedy of the Horatii be beautiful, or not? Every individual's feelings may satisfy himself, in the judgment which he forms on the subject, but they will not enable him to satisfy others that his judgment is right. It is discussion and examination alone that will enable him to shew whether it be beautiful or otherwise; but if this discussion be properly conducted, it must be founded on feeling.

The difficulty of conceiving how it is possible to reason concerning our feelings, or to reduce them to the laws of discussion and philosophy, has, no doubt, led to the error, that we should trust, in all matters of taste, to feeling alone. This difficulty has been a stumbling-block not only to the unlearned, but to the learned; not only to those who feel without reasoning, but to those who reason without feeling. The following reflections, however, will enable us to perceive the possibility of reasoning concerning our feelings.

The beauties of nature are continually before our eyes, and we have, therefore, constant opportunities of noticing what is agreeable, from what is otherwise. We know not, it is true, why certain forms and colours are more agreeable than others, but, having once noticed that they are so, it must easily occur to us, that to produce a pleasing imitation of what is agreeable in nature, we must introduce into it such qualities as please us most when we perceive them in natural objects. Certain forms, attitudes, and expressions of the human countenance, for instance, please us more than other forms, attitudes, and expressions; and we naturally select those which please, and reject those which displease us. In contemplating, however, several beautiful faces, a painter cannot find any of them perfectly beautiful, not that he knows, *a priori*, what would constitute perfect

beauty, but that he perceives in the most pleasing countenance, some particular feature or part less pleasing than he beheld in other countenances. He admires the beautiful forehead, expressive eyes, and delicate lips of one man; but he does not perceive that fine mixture of red and white in his cheeks that appeared so agreeable to him in other faces. His eyebrows are not so well divided, and they are rather formal than neatly turned. The nose is large, and neither straight nor well squared; and the chin is neither white, soft, nor agreeably rounded, qualities which pleased him so much in other faces. On the other hand, where he sees the cheeks, nose, and chin marked with these pleasing forms, in another countenance, he has to regret the absence of the fine open forehead, the soft and delicate lips, and the bright and expressive eyes, that pleased him in the former. It is obvious, then, that in painting a beautiful face, he follows none of the models which nature presents to him, but selects from each what pleases him most. To produce, therefore, a fine and beautiful countenance, he must attentively study and compare all the different models which nature offers to his view, and exercise his own judgment in selecting what appears most, and rejecting what appears least calculated to impart delight. The work which he produces, and which is the result of this attentive

comparison, is therefore, in the strictest sense, a work of judgment, reasoning, comparison, and discussion. Every form and feature of beauty which appears in it, owes its existence to those various acts of judgment and comparison which he exercised during the composition and execution of the design; and all this investigation and comparison is only the investigation and comparison of his own feelings; so that it is obvious he has rendered his own feelings the direct objects of reasoning and discussion. It is also obvious, that all men are not so well qualified to judge of such a piece as they would be to judge of those appearances, which nature generally presents to them. In the first place, they must exercise the same acts of judgment which the artist exercised, before they can view the painting in the same light that he does; but to do so, they must have examined, with equal attention, the original forms in natural objects which he selected for his work. Those who give themselves this habit of comparison and examination are comparatively few, and of these few the number who would judge, and prefer as he has done, certain forms, colours, dispositions, attitudes, expressions, contrasts, and oppositions, to all others, are still much less in number. The attitude and expression which harmonize with some fancy or mental association, that exists perhaps only in his own mind, may

have little to recommend them to others, who never indulged such a fancy, or formed such an association before. Hence it is, that many things in the paintings of the sublime Angelo, appear *outré* and extravagant, to some of the best judges of painting.

It is certain, that the more excellence appears in any painting, the more the painter must have studied, examined, and compared the original beauties in nature from which he selected the matter of his work. It is equally certain, that, notwithstanding all this study, examination, comparison, and discussion, he has not attempted to introduce into it any feature of beauty, of which some archetype did not originally present itself in natural objects; for as he has no idea of the effect which any particular feature of beauty can produce, but by the emotion which it has produced in himself, and as he could not feel the emotion till that particular feature presented itself, and as there is nothing originally capable of presenting such a feature but natural objects, it requires no argument to prove, that he must have taken this feature of beauty from some natural object. He might, indeed, take it from some other painting, but it can still be ultimately traced to nature, for the first person who discovered and marked this feature of beauty, must have perceived it in some natural object. The imagination

could not originally have invented it, for, unlimited as the scope of imagination appears to be, all its perceptions, notions, and ideal creations, must have their patterns, or models, in the works of nature alone. The imagination is only exercised in reviving past images, or giving them new modifications of its own; but the matter of the modifications is always the same. It has no power of creating forms of which no prototype exists in nature, or of imparting qualities of which natural objects are incapable, and which were never suggested to it by its own sensations; and as these sensations were primarily derived from the agency of sensible appearances, all its notions and conceptions of things and qualities must be ultimately referred to those things and qualities which first communicated the sensations themselves.

As it appears, then, that the excellence of every painting is determined by the correctness of that judgment which was exercised in producing it, and as the correctness of this judgment is always determined by the degree of attention which it exercised in comparing the different models of beauty which it perceived in nature, and as the preference which this comparison gave to some forms over others was determined by the nature of the emotions, or feelings, which each form separately, or in composition, excited in the

mind of the artist, it follows, in the first place, that he who would form a critical estimation of the merits of such a painting, must possess as correct a judgment as the artist by whom it was designed and executed. He does not, indeed, require to be acquainted with the mechanical part of his art, but he must be able to determine whether the different forms, attitudes, and appearances, which are presented to his view, be calculated to excite those emotions which the artist intended. It follows, in the second place, that to possess this judgment, an equal attention must have been exercised at some former time in comparing different attitudes, expressions, contrasts, oppositions, forms, colours, and so forth, with each other; for he who has not compared these different elements of beauty with each other, can have no certainty that the artist has exercised his judgment aright, not knowing but other attitudes, forms, and expressions, &c. would have more effect, appear more natural, harmonize better with the general design, and produce still more pleasing and agreeable emotions, than those which he now contemplates are calculated to impart. Without this antecedent comparison of the elements of beauty, he cannot pretend to be a judge, which is saying, in other words, that *discussion* alone can qualify him for the critical office of determining the

beauty of a painting. It is true, that when a painting is placed before him, he may have no occasion to recur to discussion: he may form a correct, and at the same time, an instantaneous judgment; but this is the mere effect of having discussed, examined, and compared frequently before, so that it is still to discussion he owes the correctness of his judgment. But, that this discussion is founded on feeling, and on no abstract principles whatever, on no philosophical reasoning that can tend in the least to diminish his pleasures, or mislead his judgment, will appear evident from the premises laid down; for as the preference which the act of comparing gives to certain forms, contrasts, expressions, &c. is determined, as I have already shewn, by the nature of the emotions, or feelings, which each of them separately, or in composition, excites in his mind, it necessarily follows, that this discussion, or comparison, rests its ultimate judgments of beauty on those *emotions*, or *feelings*, which it finally consults.

From what has been hitherto advanced, it appears, that in all disputes concerning the beauty of objects, reason and discussion should be our only guides; but that this reason and discussion should deduce all its judgments from the laws of feeling and sensibility alone. I must, however, observe, that when I make discussion the proper

judge of beauty, I mean only that species of beauty which is the proper object of taste. Instinctive beauty, by the original laws of our nature, equally affects all mankind, and is no object of taste or criticism, as will appear in my Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful. This beauty is too simple in its nature to be defined, much less to be discussed or analyzed; and yet it is certain, that it is only this instinctive beauty which all writers have had in view, who confound taste with sensibility. So far, however, from being an object of criticism, reason and discussion have no meaning when applied to it; and hence many writers on the subject, have been led astray, by an idea, that reason and taste have no connexion whatever with each other, and that they are distinct faculties of the mind, that direct themselves to objects totally different in their nature. "Thus," says Mr. Hume, "the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood; the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by shewing us the means of attaining happiness, or avoiding misery. Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a mo-

tive to action, and is the first spring, or impulse, to desire and volition."* It is obvious that Mr. Hume confounds taste with feeling or sensibility, in this passage; and, indeed, the word is generally used by the best writers in this vague and indeterminate sense; but though usage is the *jus et norma loquendi*, it is certain, that when we come to examine the strict and logical meaning of a word, it will frequently be found to differ from its popular acceptation; an acceptation, however, which must never determine the mode of inquiry which the philosopher should pursue. If reason and taste be truly distinct in their own nature, and if the former have no share in distinguishing the beautiful and sublime from deformity and bombast, how are we to determine whether the following passage in Ben Jonson has reached the true sublime, or only evaporated into unmeaning fustian, without any recourse to reasoning and discussion. If taste, as a mere instinctive feeling, can determine the matter without reason, I am willing to grant that they are distinct faculties, which form their proper judgments without soliciting each other's aid.

——————— The mother,
The expulsed Apicata, finds them there,
Whom when she saw lie spread on the degrees,
After a world of fury on herself,
Tearing her hair, defacing of her face,

* *Essays and Treatises, &c. Appendix concerning Moral Sentiment.*

Beating her breasts and womb, kneeling amazed,
Crying to Heaven, then to them; at last,
Her drowned voice got up above her woes,
And with such black and bitter execrations
As might affright the gods, and force the sun
Run backward to the East, nay make the old
Deformed Chaos rise again t' o'erwhelm
Them, us, and all the world.

Or the following passage, in "Lady Jane Gray."

GUILFORD. Give way, and let the gushing torrent come—
Behold the tears we bring to swell the deluge,
Till the flood rise upon the guilty world,
And make the ruin common.

If it should be said, that the moment we read these passages, we *feel* at once, or we perceive at once, through the mirror of taste, that these lines are turgid and unnatural, and that no exercise of reason is necessary to shew that they are dictated by a false taste; I reply, that we owe this quick decision to a feeling, or a taste, improved by reason, experience, and the refinement of the present age. No person can doubt but Ben Jonson himself deemed them admirable, and that they were perfectly suited to the taste of the age in which he lived. If, then, our taste be preferable to theirs, to what do we owe this advantage, but to reason, discussion, experience, and comparison? If taste were an original faculty of the mind, they possessed all the original faculties

that we possess, and consequently, they could form as correct a judgment of this passage as we can. Our superiority must, therefore, evidently result from experience and comparison. If, then, every act of comparison, from which a conclusion is drawn, be an act of reason, in the most rigid acceptation of that term, it follows, that the improved taste which results from comparison, is founded on reason and judgment, and that that taste which consults neither reason nor judgment has little to recommend it to our esteem, unless we deem the taste of a people emerging from barbarism more natural, and less vitiated by imitation or authority, than the taste of a refined and cultivated people.

If, however, it should still be insisted upon, that feeling alone is sufficient to convince us, that the passages, which I have now quoted, are void of all true sublimity, it still remains to be accounted for, how we are to determine the beauty or sublimity of passages which are contested by the critics. Does not each of them endeavour to prove his own opinion by reason alone? and no instance can be produced in which reason leads them to false conclusions, except where these conclusions are deduced from abstract principles, that have no immediate application to the laws of human nature or sensibility. It is true, we may rest all our judgments of beauty on the principles of feeling, and yet, from a misapplication of these

principles, fall into error. An example will satisfactorily prove, that we have recourse to reason in deciding on the blemishes or beauties of writing, even when we rest all our arguments on feeling alone.

"Addressing the several parts of one's body," says Dr. Blair, in his sixteenth Lecture, "as if they were animated, is not congruous to the dignity of passion. For this reason, I must condemn the following passage in a very beautiful poem, Mr. Pope's Eloisa to Abelard.

> "Dear fatal name, rest ever unreveal'd,
> Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd;
> Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise
> Where, mix'd with God's, his loved idea lies;
> O write it not, my hand—the name appears
> Already written, wash it out, my tears."

Here are several different objects and parts of the body personified, and each of them is addressed and spoken to: let us consider with what propriety. *Dear fatal name,* &c.: to this no reasonable objection can be made; for as the name of a person often stands for the person himself, and suggests the same ideas, it can bear this personification with sufficient dignity. Next Eloisa speaks to herself, and personifies her heart for this purpose: *hide it, my heart,* &c. As the heart is a dignified part of the human frame, and is often put for the mind or affections, this, too, may pass

without blame. But when from her heart she passes to her hand, and tells her hand not to write his name, this is forced and unnatural; a personified hand is low, and not in the style of true passion; and the figure becomes still worse, when, in the last place, she exhorts her tears to wash out what her hand had written: *O write it not*, &c. There is in these two lines an air of epigrammatic conceit, which native passion never suggests, and which is altogether unsuitable to the tenderness which breathes through the rest of that admirable poem."

In this critique of Dr. Blair, he points out certain blemishes in the passage which he has quoted from Pope; and in proving them to be blemishes, he has, if I mistake not, recourse to a very just and natural mode of discussion; while his arguments to prove them contrary to the *dignity of true passion*, are strictly founded, as they ought to be, on the laws of feeling. But, if he had not recourse to reason at all, how would mere taste, considering it as a faculty that derives no assistance from reason, enable him to perceive the blemishes which he has pointed out? I feel no hesitation in saying, that many who read this passage before they read Dr. Blair's criticism, and many who have since read it and are ignorant of its being criticised, have pronounced these two lines beautiful, pathetic, and in the true style of

passion. Their judgment, however, was founded on the immediate feeling, or emotion, which it excited in their mind, without consulting reason, or critically examining its individual parts, and the conformity of these parts to truth and nature. But suppose we should differ in opinion with Dr. Blair, and insist, that the passage which he has censured, is truly beautiful,—should we not, like him, have recourse to discussion and examination? That we should, will appear from the following critique of Mr. Payne Knight, who defends this very passage, and attempts to vindicate it from the censure of Dr. Blair.

"Every common reader," says Mr. Knight, "I believe, from the publication of the poem to the present day, has *felt* the lines here censured to be extremely affecting, and strongly expressive of the perturbed and impassioned state of mind of the person in whose name they are written. But common readers never think of making such frigid distinctions in the comparative rank and dignity of the different parts of the body, as that which the learned professor here makes between the heart and the hand; a distinction as unfair in its statement, as it is cold and frivolous in its application; for the hand is as often used metaphorically to signify energy or power, as the heart is to signify affection, or the head intellect:—'he had a head to contrive, a tongue to persuade, and a

hand to execute any mischief,' says a noble historian, of the leader of an adverse party; by which it is to be presumed, that he did not mean to signify his manual dexterity in wielding a dagger, or pulling a trigger, but his vigour and capacity for conducting and executing, as well as designing and promoting, those public measures which the historian thought mischievous."

In this criticism, Mr. Knight reasons the point as well as Dr. Blair, though he rests his argument still more on the principles of feeling and passion, than the learned professor. From Mr. Knight's view of the subject, however, I feel myself obliged to differ. And if he be in error, it arises entirely from trusting to his feelings alone, in deciding on the beauty of this passage. He seems to be one of those who imagine, that whatever warms us to rapture, or excites in us those emotions which it was the intention of the writer to awaken in the mind, must necessarily be beau tiful; and that to doubt of its beauty, is to mistrust our own feelings, to which he thinks it unwarrantable to oppose the fetters of rules or precepts; for he observes, that "it is fortunate for our own language, that it is not made a specific branch of study in our schools or colleges, as it thus escapes free from the rules and restrictions in which public professors of rhetoric would fetter and entangle it." If, however, these rules and re-

strictions had been so little attended to as he seems to wish, I doubt whether he himself would possess a more correct or classic taste than Ben Jonson, Cowley, or even Shakspeare, who, with all his genius, and intimate acquaintance with the springs and motives of human actions, possessed but a very wretched and miserable taste. Rules and restrictions, therefore, so far from fettering language, only redeem it from those gross and barbarous violations of purity, precision, clearness, and propriety of expression, which a false and licentious taste would naturally engraft upon it; and the classic taste which Mr. Knight himself evinces, in his own writings, sufficiently demonstrates, that he has paid a strict and close attention to the best models which our language afforded him. Rules and restrictions impose no fetters on whatever is natural or chaste in sentiment, or whatever is beautiful or sublime in expression; and if they only restrict what is opposite to these characters of truth and nature, they cannot be too rigidly observed.

But to examine Mr. Knight's criticism more minutely. I will readily admit "the lines here censured to be extremely affecting;" but does it follow, that because they are so, they are not therefore stained with the blemishes which Dr. Blair has pointed out? They have other beauties that suffice to make them *affecting*, but the affec-

tions which they excite do not result from these blemishes; on the contrary, they would be still more affecting, if these blemishes had been avoided. We perceive in the finest face some blemishes—some deviations from the line of beauty; and if all the other features of the face had been similar to these, no trace of beauty could at all be recognized. Will it then be said, that these blemishes are not blemishes because, on the whole, the face appears beautiful? On the contrary, we should rather conclude, that if they should be deemed blemishes in any face, they must be so in all faces; and we should, consequently, hold that beauty in greater admiration, which, in spite of these blemishes, recommended itself to us, and commanded our esteem. How many noble and sublime passages do we meet with in Shakspeare, which contain, notwithstanding, the grossest violations, not indeed of the truth, beauty, or sublimity of the sentiment which he wishes to express, but of that chaste and happy simplicity, with which a writer of equal genius, but of a more improved taste, would have expressed it! The beauty of the principal thought, however, which is that alone which fixes our attention at the first moment, and before reason has time to examine the lesser faults, renders us inattentive to every thing but that which so strongly lays hold of our sympathies. The admi-

ration which the sentiment itself so powerfully excites, makes us admire the whole; and, like the lover who is blind to the faults of his mistress, we do not stop to examine with a cold and hesitating sympathy, that beauty which dazzles us by its native effulgence. Our admiration, however, does not remove the faults and blemishes that adhere to the beauty by which we are captivated, and they have as real an existence as if they were the first *objects* that caught our attention. But is the critic to pass over these faults like the common reader? Undoubtedly he must, if Mr. Knight's observations be just; and yet Mr. Knight himself, in a subsequent part of his work, severely censures those who blindly admire every thing they meet with in writers of established reputation. "The blind admiration," he says, "with which the mass of mankind read works of established reputation, precludes all discrimination whether of judgment or feeling. Not to be delighted with what they have always heard, in general terms, is *fine*, might argue a want of capacity to comprehend, or a want of taste to relish its merits; to avoid the imputation of which, they applaud without reserve, and conclude that every peculiarity which they meet with, is a peculiarity of excellence, whether they understand it or not. Upon this principle, there is scarcely any anomaly of grammar in Shakspeare, or of metre in Milton,

that has not found even professed critics to praise and commend it as a beauty." Of the truth of the observation which Mr. Knight makes here, he furnishes us with a striking example himself, in his critique on the passage quoted from Pope; for his admiration of the entire passage has laid such hold of his sympathies, that he will not suffer himself to believe that it is tinged with the slightest blemish. And, indeed, it is difficult to read the words,

> Dear fatal name, rest ever unreveal'd,
> Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd;
> Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
> Where, mix'd with God's, his loved idea lies—

without catching a portion of that love-sick but hallowed spirit by which they are dictated. Nothing can be more finely imagined, than that mingled emotion which binds Eloisa to her lover and to her God. All is love, but a love so pure and unmixed with the slightest particle of carnal affection, that it could not taint the purity of an angel. Perhaps greater praise cannot be given to these lines, than to say, that they appear as affecting and impassioned to Mr. Knight himself, as to other readers; for he professes to consider "*mere animal desire*" alone to be "a natural affection of the mind," and says, that sentimental love, "if it ever existed at all, partook more of the nature of

a sophism than a sentiment, and was rather a metaphysical delusion of the understanding, than an energetic affection of the soul."* But to return, if these tender and affecting lines had not preceded the two with which Dr. Blair finds fault, or if they possessed the same air of "epigrammatic conceit" which is evident in these two lines, I apprehend Mr. Knight would not enter the lists so warmly in their defence. He calls Dr. Blair's distinction between "the comparative rank of the different parts of the body" *cold and frivolous:* the fact, however, is, that it is the lines which he censures that are cold and frivolous, and not the distinction, for it is strictly founded in nature. To address our hand, or our tears, whatever Mr. Knight may think to the contrary, is a low species of personification; and has too much the trick of authorship about it. It savours too much of art, or rather it has not the art to conceal the art which it has made use of. Its fault, therefore, is not in having too much art, but in having too little; for the greatest art is that which conceals itself by a close and faithful imitation of nature. When Eloisa addresses her hand, she addresses it as something distinct from herself, and possessed of a distinct intelligence and sympathy, capable of weighing the justice of

* Analytical Principles of Taste, p. 189.

her request, and of granting it, if it appeared reasonable: these qualities, attributed to the hand, are warranted by no authority whatever; it is not, like the head, the seat of intellect, nor like the heart, the seat of affection. All the qualities ascribed to the hand, in the best writers, are those of energy, force, power, ruin and devastation; and even in the passages quoted by Mr. Knight himself, these are the only attributes which are given to it. But it is not to such a power that Eloisa is supposed to address herself: she is supposed to address her hand as she does her heart; but as it wants that character of sympathy, which peculiarly belongs to the heart, her address "is forced and unnatural." When she addresses her heart, she only addresses herself; for heart, soul, and mind, are identified with self, in the language of passion. She creates, therefore, no other personage, nor divides herself into different intelligences; as when she addresses her hand and her tears, which have no mark of intellect in themselves, the former being the mere instrument of which the head makes use, and the latter, mere signs of what passes in the heart. I cannot, therefore, see what application the passage quoted by Mr. Knight has to the one in question, "He had a head to contrive, a tongue to persuade, and a hand to execute any mischief." Here there is no address to the hand, nor is it

considered as something distinct from the person to whom it belongs. The hand is here a mere instrument made use of to execute the mischief contrived by the head. Besides, the character that marks the band in this passage, is, as I have already observed, the very reverse of that sympathizing power to which Eloisa is supposed to address herself. To address her tears would not, perhaps, in her impassioned state of mind, be so objectionable, if the purpose for which she addresses them, did not prove her either actually mad, or fraught with the deepest artifice; she evidently did not wish to blot out the name, and to affect such a wish was hypocrisy of the worst kind. Had she, in addressing her tears, merely bid them cease, no reasonable objection could be made to such an address, because the sentiment was natural. A passage, therefore, which Mr. Knight quotes from Shakspeare equally fails in its application:

> ——————— Old fond eyes,
> Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out,
> And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
> To temper clay.

Lear's address to his eyes in this passage, is natural and in the true style of passion. Nothing can be more natural than for a parent to weep for the ingratitude of his children; but having indulged

sorrow for a moment, it is equally natural to summon up that pride which is mortified by neglect. It is, then, real unaffected nature in Lear to threaten to pluck out his eyes if they renewed their sorrow.

There is, besides, an important difference between addressing the hand, and talking of it in the third person, as will appear evident by comparing the two lines

> O write it not, my hand—the name appears
> Already written—wash it out my tears,

with the following:

> In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays;
> Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.

The passage which Mr. Knight has quoted from Shakspeare, though beautiful in itself, has, like many of the fine passages quoted from that celebrated poet, and like that now quoted from Pope, a blemish, which, however, is not attended to in the first impression which the general or leading sentiment makes on the mind. The blemish to which I allude is contained in the words, "*to temper clay;*" as it is unnatural to suppose, that the idea conveyed by these words, would occur to Lear, in that strong and violent agitation of mind in which he is supposed to have been at the time. Ardent and impassioned feelings leave no room

for philosophy or observation; and under such feelings, Lear would never reflect, or if he did reflect, he would not stop to express it, that tears had the property of tempering clay. Our sympathies, however, are so powerfully excited by the sentiment,

> ——————— Old fond eyes,
> Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out,
> And cast you, with the waters that you lose,

that the subsequent reflection is entirely left out by the mind, and no attention paid to its propriety or impropriety.

I have quoted these two criticisms on the passage from Pope, merely to shew, that he who trusts most to feelings, in his judgments of beauty, is more likely to be mistaken, than he who tries the testimony of his feelings, by the standard of precept and established authority; and to shew likewise, that though it is possible to form a mental judgment of what is, or is not beautiful, it is not so easy to shew that this judgment is right, without recurring to reason and discussion.

Mr. Knight himself, who investigates and discusses with much ingenuity, and frequently with great force of reasoning, tells us, that "rhetoric and criticism can never supply a man with memory to retain, or judgment to select, though they may teach him to abuse both, by sub-

stituting fashion for feeling, artifice for nature, and affectation for simplicity." And elsewhere observes, that "he who either writes or acts according to natural feeling and common sense, will, unless very perversely organized, be right sometimes; but he who does either by system, may stand a chance of being uniformly and invariably wrong."* If rhetoric and criticism will not direct our judgment, it follows, that eloquence and common sense are founded on no principles of right reason, and that the orator and the writer are subject to no restrictions whatever. Rhetoric only professes to point out the means of attaining to excellence, and of avoiding defects, in public debates; but if these means do not exist,—if it be impossible to attain the one, or to avoid the other, we must necessarily conclude, that truth, nature, and simplicity, are characters that cannot belong to oratory or eloquence. If they do exist, they can be pointed out, and our judgments directed to attain them. The same may be said of criticism. It consists in observations made on the faults and beauties of thought and expression in writing. If there be faults and beauties, they can be pointed out; and when we perceive them pointed out, our judgments are necessarily directed and improved. To maintain, therefore, that our judg-

* Principles of Taste, p. 252.

ments cannot be directed, is to maintain that there are neither faults nor beauties in writing, which is, in my opinion, verging upon nonsense. Dr. Blair, in censuring the passage quoted from Pope, has been guided by the rules of oratory; yet he has not substituted artifice to nature, or affectation to simplicity. On the contrary, these rules have enabled him to detect the artifice and affectation that characterize the two lines which he condemns, and which Mr. Knight, who trusts to feeling and nature alone, has endeavoured to vindicate. Here, then, we see, that the disciple of feeling and nature is an advocate for artifice and affectation, while the professor of rhetoric justly exposes both. When Mr. Knight tells us, that "he who writes according to natural feeling and common sense, will, unless very perversely organized, be right sometimes," he claims less for such a writer, than I am willing to admit; for I believe he will not only be right sometimes, but will always be so; nor can I understand, how a man who writes according to natural feeling, can be perversely organized. The great difficulty, however, is to write according to natural feeling; for no feeling can be natural that does not agree with the common feeling of mankind; and it is the difficulty of becoming acquainted with this common feeling, that renders the precepts and rules of criticism and taste, of such important utility.

They distinguish such thoughts and feelings as agree best with the common feeling of mankind, from those erroneous feelings and fantastic associations that exist in the minds of particular individuals. "The general rules of beauty," says Mr. Hume, "are of use, being drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases when presented singly and in a high degree." If by that natural feeling which Mr. Knight considers the best guide in writing and in acting, he only means, the particular feelings of every individual, it follows, that if every individual ought to be guided by his own feelings, whatever they be, falsehood and error are preferable to truth, whenever they are agreeable to our feelings; and when men differ with each other in opinion, they have no right to attempt convincing each other, for as each of them should be guided by his own feelings, he would be wrong in adopting those of another. If, however, the light of common sense directs us to adopt the sentiments of another in preference to our own, whenever he is right, and ours are wrong; and if the sentiments and feelings of a thousand approach nearer to the common feeling than that of an individual; and if this common feeling be the true standard of taste, it follows that the rules of criticism, of oratory, and of all the arts and sciences, are to be preferred to our own feelings, as a guide; because they are only

memorials of what is most approved of by the generality of mankind.

It cannot, however, be doubted, but that the rules of criticism and oratory, as well as of poetry, painting, and of all the arts that are founded on feeling, and not on demonstrative reasoning, or, in other words, of all the arts that address themselves to the passions, and not to the understanding, are calculated to lead us into error, if adopted without any modification or reference to time, place, or circumstance. It is circumstance, or situation, that determines the propriety of all rules and precepts; and therefore, where two circumstances are nearly, but not entirely the same, the precept that is applicable to the one, will not, without some modification, be applicable to the other. It frequently happens, however, that the circumstance to which we apply any particular precept, or canon, of taste or criticism, is not exactly the same with that on which this canon was originally founded. They may, however, be so nearly alike, that a person not gifted with the exquisite acumen of genius, can perceive no difference, and he therefore adopts the precept without any modification whatever. It must not, however, be supposed, that the rules of criticism are calculated to lead us into error, because they are liable to be misapplied. He who has not feeling and discernment sufficient to perceive, that the disposition or situation of things to which he applies them, is

different from those on which they are founded, cannot surely be allowed to possess that judgment and capacity, which would have guided him without their assistance. Many of the rules of criticism are nearly allied to each other, because the cases to which they are applied are nearly alike in themselves. If, then, we should adopt a rule that seems applicable to the case to which we wish to apply it, instead of a rule still more applicable with which we happen not to be acquainted, it will not only lead us into error, but produce what may be called false beauty in the sentiment that arises from it. Instead, however, of ascribing this false beauty to the rules of criticism or taste, we should rather ascribe it to our ignorance of these rules; for if we knew the exact rule that suited us, it would not lead us to the production of false sentiments or beauties. It is a rule in criticism, that no sentiment should be below the tone of the passion; but the writer who would be guided by this rule, without regard to the other rules by which it is qualified, might, in expressing his joy, cry out with Othello:

——————— O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death.
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus high, and duck again as low
As hell's from heaven!

But had he known that there was another golden rule which says:

> Est modus in rebus; sunt certi denique fines
> Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum,—

he would perhaps have tempered his joy, and expressed it in more natural and appropriate terms. It is doubtful, however, whether, if he had even been acquainted with this rule, he might not think himself justified in transgressing it by one of equal authority.

> ——————— Mediocribus esse poetis
> Non Dii, non homines, non concessere columnæ.

But if he knew what Horace meant by contemning poetical mediocrity, he would find it perfectly agree with that *modus in rebus* which he elsewhere prescribes. To those who do not clearly and critically discern the spirit of the rules of criticism, many of them will appear to contradict each other. If, then, a writer, who wants this discernment should be systematically wrong, it is surely more reasonable to ascribe his errors to that poverty of intellect which cannot comprehend them, than to the misguiding influence of the rules themselves. It is not to be expected, that he who cannot understand the general precepts of fine writing, can possess a feeling or discernment that

would guide him without their assistance. It is true, these precepts will lead him into error, because he cannot seize their spirit and meaning; but it is equally true, that he could not have avoided error had he never consulted them. The science of fine writing is like the science of religion: there is scarcely a violation of purity or elegance that does not *seem* to be sanctioned by the authority of some established precept, merely because it is not understood, or because a latitude of meaning is given to the terms in which it is expressed; and there is scarcely a system of false religion which the human mind can frame, but seems to be supported by some text in Scripture, because the letter and not the spirit of the text is all that is attended to, and perhaps often all that human sagacity can discern. We are not, then, to be surprised, if they who cannot penetrate into the spirit of the established rules of criticism, should be systematically, or, to use the words of Mr. Knight, should "always be wrong;" not, however, as Mr. Knight wishes to make us believe, because these rules are calculated to mislead us, but because we want that grasp of mind which would perceive, at a glance, how conformable these precepts are to the original dictates of nature.

I am, indeed, willing to admit, that he who has a slight acquaintance with the rules of criticism, will be more apt to adopt false sentiments of

beauty, than he who knows nothing about them, and is entirely guided by the light of nature. The latter seldom extends his ideas beyond those familiar objects of knowledge with which he is immediately conversant; and though the light of nature seldom supplies the mind with those treasures of information which are derived from an acquaintance with the discoveries, and an investigation of the thoughts and reasonings of others, it has, at least, the advantage of not misleading us with false notions of things. So far as it instructs us, it instructs us with certainty; it teaches us humility, by the conviction which it gives us of our ignorance; it informs us that our circle of knowledge is extremely limited, when compared with the intelligence of others; and by thus rendering us distrustful of our own powers, it teaches us, that though we may give an unbounded rein to the excursions of fancy and imagination, we can have no reliance on whatever is not marked with the characters of intuitive evidence. Hence it is, that men who are solely guided by the light of nature, are given to admiration and surprise; a proof that they do not pretend to understand whatever is not clear and obvious; for admiration ceases the moment real or imaginary knowledge accounts for the cause by which it is excited. Those who are guided, therefore, by the light of nature, and who are

totally ignorant of the thoughts, opinions, and doctrines of others, seldom adopt any important errors, because they seldom extend their ideas to those subjects, in the contemplation of which, even reason and philosophy often find themselves involved in doubt and perplexity. But this does not argue, that the light of nature is a safer and more unerring guide, than the light of instruction and science. I am, therefore, willing to admit, that many errors have had a long and established reputation in the world; and that these errors were confined to literary people, who adopted each other's opinions, either because they believed them to be true, or because they could not prove them to be false. So far, then, I allow, that authority and precept were calculated to mislead; but if the illiterate part of mankind were free from these errors, it was not because the light of nature was a safer guide than the light of authority, but because it did not afford even a glimmering conception of those matters which bewildered the literary world.

The man, therefore, who, not satisfied with that information which the light of nature affords, becomes slightly acquainted with the works of literary men, will, unless endowed with extraordinary faculties, seldom be able to

——————— read each work of wit
With the same spirit which its author writ,

and must, therefore, unavoidably fall into more errors than he who remained quiet in his ignorance. Hence it is that, in learning,

> ——shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
> But drinking largely sobers us again.

Established authority is, therefore, the true standard of taste, with regard to such beauties as have been already decided upon; for if they had not been agreeable to the common feeling of mankind, they would never have become established. By established authority, however, I do not mean the authority of the writers of any particular country, but that authority which has received the concurrent sanction of all ages, and of all nations; and whoever pretends to be a judge of beauty, in the works of nature or of art, must attentively and unremittingly study to make himself acquainted with all the precepts and canons of taste and criticism which have been most generally approved. In judging, however, of those beauties which, from the originality of their character, cannot be decided by the authority of rules and precepts; and likewise in determining such disputes, in matters of taste, as have been contested by the best writers, and which are as yet *sub judice*, we must entirely trust to that investigation which is founded on feeling, always holding in view the relation which the beauty

of which we take cognizance bears to those which are already decided upon by the best writers and judges of sensible and intellectual beauty. But to suppose, that in matters of taste, where all writers are agreed as to the beauty of a painting, a poem, or any natural object, it is still possible that they may all be mistaken, and that what they have deemed beautiful, may virtually be otherwise, is to suppose, that men are not really and actually pleased, when they feel that emotion which mankind express by the name of pleasure. A metaphysician may prove, and it has been proved by Locke, that all men were mistaken, in supposing the existence of innate ideas; but a metaphysician can never prove, that an object at whose presence, or a passage in Homer or Milton at the recital of which, all men are pleased, is devoid of beauty; because the very essence of beauty consists in imparting that pleasure to the cause of which the term beautiful is applied. If all the world believed, that a part was greater than the whole, all the world would be mistaken, because the truth of this axiom did not depend on the opinion or belief of mankind; for a part would be greater than the whole, if such a being as man had never been created; but when all the world say, that they are pleased at the presence of an object, they cannot be mistaken, because this pleasure contains nothing in it that is abstract

or foreign to the nature of man: it has no existence but what it derives from himself; and its existence ceases with his. It has its existence, therefore, in the very nature of man, and though, by metaphysical subtleties, we may point out a thousand disagreeable qualities in an object, or in a passage in Homer or Virgil, which is universally deemed beautiful or sublime, the very circumstance of its giving pleasure, overthrows at once all the fine-spun arguments which we have advanced against it. It is, then, idle to argue against universal authority in matters of feeling, though it has been often successfully combated in matters of pure abstract reasoning. The very essence of beauty consists in exciting an emotion of delight. To prove, therefore, that the object which excites this emotion is not beautiful, is to prove that what pleases does not please. I am willing to admit, that a real blemish may be found in the finest passage, as a speckle may be found in the finest face; and I am aware, that it is these blemishes that give critics and abstract reasoners an opportunity of arguing with such speciousness against the beauty of some of the finest passages in writing. But it is futile, and beneath the dignity of true criticism, to catch at these minor faults; for, as Dryden happily expresses it,

> Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
> He who would search for pearls must dive below.

It cannot, however, be inferred from these blemishes, that the passages in which they are found are not beautiful in themselves; because, in the first place, they impart that pleasure which proves them to be beautiful, and, in the second place, they no more constitute the passages in which they occur, than a finger constitutes a woman. A finger may be crooked, or deformed; but, if the rest of the body be extremely beautiful, the deformity of the finger will not lessen, at least in a sensible degree, the emotion of pleasure which is felt at the presence of her to whom it belongs. If, then, a blemish is found in a fine passage in poetry, the true critic will allow the passage to be, what it really is, extremely beautiful; though he deems it a duty which he owes to truth, to point out the most trifling fault which he perceives in it; not, however, in the spirit of a Dennis, to prove the passage itself devoid of beauty, but to direct and improve the judgments of others, and to guard them against similar defects. The following beautiful passage in Milton, is highly expressive of the unbending spirit of Satan, in replying to the threats of the Angel Gabriel; yet the image conveyed by the last word, is observed by Lord Kames, in his "Elements of Criticism," to be too grand and delightful to be "the genuine offspring of rage."

Then when I am thy captive, talk of chains,
Proud limitary Cherub; but, ere then,
Far heavier load thyself expect to feel
From my prevailing arm, though heaven's King
Ride on thy wing, and thou, with thy compeers,
Used to the yoke, drawest his triumphant wheels
In progress through the road of heaven *star-paved.*

If it can be shewn, on any just grounds, that the epithet "star-paved" is incongruous to the passion by which the arch-fiend was actuated, at the moment, we must acknowledge, that it is a blemish; while it would still be the very worst sort of criticism to assert, that the passage itself is not extremely beautiful, because, with the exception of this epithet alone, it strongly expresses the feelings by which Satan is supposed to have been actuated, and it is the interest which the just expression of these feelings creates in our mind, that renders it beautiful, and diverts our attention from this objectionable epithet, should it appear to be such. A man should not be condemned if he has only one vice, nor a passage censured which has only one fault. If, however, this epithet be objectionable, it certainly does not arise from its conveying a grand and delightful image, though I allow, if the "star-paved" heavens had presented so imposing a spectacle to Satan as it does to us, it would be as grand, perhaps, as imagination can conceive. But it should be recollected, that

what appears grand to us, would not appear grand to Satan, and therefore, if it be objectionable at all, it is because it is used by Milton to convey an image of which Satan would never think. He who was himself an inhabitant of heaven, and whose pride made him aspire to be its supreme chief, could not certainly think of expressing any surprise at the materials of which it was composed. They would be as familiar to his eyes, if we may attribute eyes to a spirit, and as little calculated to excite his surprise, as the flags of London would be to excite the astonishment of an old citizen. The "star-paved heavens" might, therefore, present to the mind of Milton a grand and sublime spectacle, but Satan would never dream of such grandeur; and, therefore, it was just as unlikely that he would use the term, as that the old citizen would use the expression of the flag-paved London.

Though I am, therefore, willing to admit, that if the epithet "star-paved" could be supposed to excite the same emotion of grandeur in him who "durst defy the Omnipotent to arms," that it does in us, it would be "too grand and delightful to be the genuine offspring of rage;" yet I cannot allow, that in the mouth of Satan, it could express any emotion of the kind. Neither can I allow, that rage was the passion by which Satan appears to have been actuated in this passage.

He was evidently governed by the spirit of unconquerable pride: every expression he makes use of, shews a full and fearless confidence in his own powers; but rage is the passion of weakness. He who is confident of victory, never becomes fretful, irritable, or enraged; but he who, feeling his own weakness, would still rather die than submit, necessarily becomes desperate and enraged. This weakness did not belong to the character of Satan; and had he even felt it, his pride should not have suffered any expression to escape him, by which it could be discovered. Milton, therefore, makes him speak in the language of confidence, not of fear. If, then, the epithet "star-paved" be objectionable, it is not because it conveys a grand and delightful image, nor yet because it cannot be "the genuine offspring of rage;" for this is not the passion by which Satan was actuated, at least so far as we can judge by the terms of which he makes use. I am willing, however, to admit, that if the "star-paved heavens" appeared grand and sublime to Satan, Milton would have shewn little judgment in making him use it, or any expression which would betray the emotion which this grandeur excited, whatever the passion was by which he was actuated at the moment; for it was incongruous, not only to the passion of rage, which Lord Kames ascribes to him, but also to that unbending, uncompromising

pride, which first made him dispute the sovereignty of heaven with the Deity himself, to use any expressions, by which he would either openly or tacitly acknowledge the grandeur or sublimity which he with whom he contended had impressed upon his works. We are warranted by the scriptures to believe, that even the angels of heaven are not fully acquainted with the nature of the Deity, where Christ says, that not only himself, but the angels of heaven are ignorant of a certain fact. Of this Milton seems to have been perfectly aware, and therefore he puts no expression, so far as I can remember, into the mouth of Satan, in which his omnipotence is acknowledged. And, indeed, if Milton had made Satan acknowledge, either openly or tacitly, the omnipotence of the Deity, he would have shewn great want of judgment; because it is obvious, that if Satan knew from the commencement the omnipotence of God, neither he, nor the rebel host who joined him, would ever have dared to lift their arms against him, who they knew could crush them in a moment. Not only the pride, but the ignorance of Satan, would, therefore, have prevented him from extolling any part of his works, whatever the passion was by which he was actuated; and therefore, if he used the term "star-paved" to convey a grand and sublime image, he would evidently acknowledge that omnipotence of which Milton ought to suppose him

ignorant. But, though I am willing to admit, that the epithet "star-paved" would have been improperly put into the mouth of Satan, even though the passion by which he was actuated had no alliance with rage, yet I deny that the epithet is used by Milton to express "a grand and delightful image" at all; on the contrary, it is used ironically, to express the utmost contempt for the Deity, and the angel to whom he was addressing himself. Confiding in his own strength, he tells the angel Gabriel, in a fearless tone,

> Then when I am thy captive, talk of chains,
> Proud limitary cherub; but, ere then,
> Far heavier load thyself expect to feel
> From my prevailing arm.

Does it require any penetration to perceive, that what follows is perfectly ironical. Perhaps, few have considered it so, not only because few can read a work with that unwearied attention which grasps the spirit of every passage from beginning to end, but because, the more taste and genius an author evinces in an ironical passage, the more apt we are to be deceived, and the more liable we are to suppose, that an expression is said in earnest which was dictated by the spirit of the most refined irony. The moment, however, we direct our attention to it, we shall immediately perceive, not only that it is ironical, but that it is one of the

finest examples of irony that ever came from the pen of man. Having threatened the angel Gabriel with that vengeance which was to be inflicted by his "prevailing arm," he sneeringly adds:

> ——————— Though heaven's King
> *Ride on thy wings*, and thou with thy compeers,
> *Used to the yoke, drawest his triumphant wheels*
> In progress through the road of heaven *star-paved.*

Here Satan shews his perfect contempt for the angel Gabriel, by intimating, that he could effect nothing of himself unless heaven's King rode on his wings; and this contempt is still more ironically expressed, when he describes him as "*used to the yoke,*" and drawing "*his wheels* through the road of heaven. But the epithet "star-paved," to which Lord Kames objects, evidently contains the most refined turn of irony that can be conceived. Having shewn the servility of Gabriel's occupation, he affects to remove the disgrace by intimating, that though he was harnessed to the yoke, he was sufficiently recompensed by the honour of drawing the wheels of the Deity over "star-paved heavens;" an honour which he himself professed to despise. He, therefore, uses the epithet "star-paved," not to convey a grand image, but to express his contempt for the lowliness of that ambition, which attached an idea of grandeur to those glittering baubles, in which

he insinuates the Deity and his vassal angel took such pride, but on which he affected to look down himself with superlative disdain. It appears, therefore, that the epithet "star-paved" is not objectionable, and I have already shewn, that if it even were, it ought not to be considered as affecting the beauty of the passage in which it occurs. The observations which I have here made, suggest several useful reflections. Among which may be noticed, the difficulty of reading the productions of a sublime writer, with the same spirit by which they were dictated, when a professed and elegant critic is liable to mistake it. But what I would particularly direct the attention of the reader to, is, that when a passage is universally acknowledged to be beautiful, no just criticism can ever prove it to be otherwise. The critic, indeed, may argue, that it is destitute of beauty, because he has detected one epithet in it which is objectionable; but whenever we find more in a passage to approve than to condemn, the passage must obviously be beautiful, because the emotion which it excites, has more the character of pleasure than of pain; and, whenever we ascertain that this emotion of pleasure is universally felt and acknowledged, we should always consider the question as determined, and look upon this universal feeling as the unerring standard of taste. We may, it is true, notwithstanding this universal

assent to the beauty of a passage, still discover not merely imaginary, but real and positive faults; but this does not prove the universal feeling to be mistaken in its approbation. To prove the passage not beautiful, we must prove it has more faults than beauties, or at least, that the magnitude of the former outweighs the number of the latter; for if the balance be on the side of beauty, the emotion excited will be that of pleasure, and it is this emotion that determines whether the passage be beautiful or otherwise. If we regarded nothing as beautiful but what had no fault, I doubt whether any object in the creation, at least any object of which man is qualified to take cognizance, can properly be termed beautiful. The seeds of imperfection, and deviations from that harmony or agreement of parts in which beauty consists, are profusely scattered over the works of creation; and though a more perfect harmony may be observed in some objects than in others, it is still certain, that no object presents that perfect unity or agreement of parts, in which the *beau ideal* consists. This *beau ideal* is, therefore, justly given over by modern writers, as something that has no existence, either in the works of nature or of art. Indeed it is but reasonable to conclude, that the Deity has reserved for himself that perfection to which nothing is wanting, and would therefore exercise little judgment in pur-

suing that beauty which is not visible to mortal eyes, and has not its habitation upon earth. The beauty of every object, in nature and in art, as well as the beauties of writing, must not, therefore, be determined by the circumstance of their possessing particular faults or particular beauties, for in this circumstance all objects agree; but in determining which of these qualities prevail most in the subject of which we take cognizance; because the emotion of pleasure, or disgust, will always be determined by the qualities which predominate most, and this emotion, when it is found to be universally, or even generally felt, is the ultimate standard to which we must appeal.

I am, indeed, willing to admit, that when any natural object makes an impression on any individual, different from what it makes on men in general, this impression is natural; and, consequently, if what appears beautiful to others, will not appear so to him, the object, strictly and properly speaking, has no beauty, so far as it regards the individual who cannot feel it. In whatever manner he is constituted with regard to the object, the impression will be conformable to this constitution. If the structure of his organs be differently modified from that of all other men, the impression made upon them must necessarily be different; but, notwithstanding this difference, it is still natural, for it is natural that every im-

pression should correspond with the nature of the subject on which it is made. A scarlet colour is painful to the sight of an ox or a turkey, and, therefore, they will run and attack it with the greatest rage; but though it does not produce a similar sensation in other animals, it is not, on that account, the less natural in them, as their eyes are so constructed as to be hurt by that colour. If, then, an individual should differ in opinion with all others, in judging of the beauty of any object, and if he should pronounce it ugly, when all other men pronounce it beautiful, I freely admit, that, as far as it regards him, the object is ugly, and the disagreeable emotion which it has excited in his mind is natural, because, if all men were similarly constructed in the contexture of their organs, they would feel and judge as he does. But if such a man wrote a treatise on beauty, in which he endeavoured to prove that there was no beauty in this object, the world would justly laugh at him for his pains; for beauty does not consist in what pleases one individual, or a hundred, but in what pleases the great bulk of mankind. When, therefore, writers advance particular arguments against certain beauties in writing, without waiting to examine whether the feeling of mankind is, or is not, against the theory which they advance, they act like the man who differed with all other men in his ideas of beauty, and

would therefore persuade them that they were mistaken. Much diversity of opinion has prevailed regarding the propriety of rhyme, in English versification, and none of the writers on the subject seem to have paid much attention to the question, whether rhyme or blank verse is most generally pleasing, or which is most agreeable to the ear; for in my opinion, the entire dispute turns on this question alone. If blank verse be as agreeable to the ear as rhyme, I believe it must be allowed, that it is equally capable of conveying all the beauties of sentiment and imagination; but if it be not so agreeable, to what purpose do we seek for arguments to prove it to be, what it is not felt to be. Some writers seem to have no better argument for exploding rhyme, than its not having been adopted by the Greek and Latin writers: but surely, if the genius of these languages were such as to afford other pleasures to the ear which amply compensated for the absence of rhyme, if these pleasures were sensibly felt and acknowledged, and if they are neither felt nor acknowledged in English versification, except by those who affect to be pleased because they sacrifice feeling to an authority, the nature of which they do not comprehend, we must surely form very arbitrary notions of the nature of beauty, to suppose that it can belong to any species of versification which is not pleasing or agreeable. That the

authority of the Greek and Latin writers is no authority for us, and that they would not have preferred blank verse to rhyme, if the genius of their language had not rendered the former more pleasing to the ear, will appear evident, if we consider the manner in which their words were pronounced. "The length and shortness of syllables," says Dr. Gregory, "in the Greek and Roman languages, which constituted their quantities, were determined by rules no less accurate than the notes in music; and on the proper adjustment of these quantities, the harmony of their metre depended. A stated interval of time was allowed to the pronunciation of every verse. Such is the exquisite mechanism of their metre, that their verses cannot be read without producing a rich, and often a melodious intonation, perceptible even to an unlettered ear." From this structure of the Greek and Latin tongues, it follows, that every line possessed music in itself, and did not, therefore, require a corresponding line to give it that melody which it possessed already. It is, therefore, difficult to break even a single line in such a manner, but that, as Dr. Johnson observes, "*invenias etiam disjecti membra poetæ*, some harmony will still remain, and the due proportions of sound will always be discovered." If our language possesses no advantage similar to this, how frivolous is it to look up to the authority of the

Greek and Roman poets, or to consider them as an authority, in determining whether blank verse or rhyme is best suited to the genius of the English language. They used the former, because it was most pleasing to the ear; but if we reflect, that they were more studious, and better judges of the melody of language than we are, it is contrary to every rule of right reasoning, and to all the evidences which history supplies, to conclude, that they would still use the same sort of versification, if it were not attended with that pleasure which it was so admirably calculated to impart. It is the power of exciting this pleasure, therefore, that constituted its beauty; and as the principles by which it was produced, are foreign to the nature of our language, we must consequently seek for other principles, and another species of versification, to render our poetry capable of imparting a similar delight. This is only to be derived from the assistance of rhyme; for all our efforts have been unable to discover any other means of rendering English versification as melodious as that of the Greek and Roman poetry. Whatever pleases, then, in both, is what constitutes beauty, and that, simply, because it does please. Philosophy may discover the elements of this beauty, or the laws by which the pleasure is communicated by each; but if these laws were never discovered, it would not be the less

certain, that the pleasure which is felt ought to be the standard by which our taste should be ultimately determined. If, indeed, music had any thing in it, that rendered the sense less clear, or less easily understood, if sentiments conveyed in blank verse, were more evident or more certain, it would be but reasonable to deny ourselves the gratification which it imparted, and conform our taste to that structure of versification which was best suited to the purposes of a rational being.

The moment, therefore, we make a comparison between any two objects, whether sensible or intellectual, in order to ascertain which is the most beautiful, the only difficulty we have to surmount, is to ascertain, which is found to be most generally pleasing. The person, however, who makes the comparison, is not to regard, for a moment, which is most pleasing or agreeable to himself, if he know, at the same time, that it is not the most pleasing or agreeable to mankind. If his own feelings could enable him to determine the matter, there are few objects in nature that would not be both beautiful and ugly, at the same moment, as there will always be found some person to differ with the general feeling, in his judgment of them. If, then, we have any means of ascertaining the general feeling, we should consider the question decided; for if any

individual should happen to differ with this general feeling, all he could prove is, that the object does not please himself, and that, therefore, he cannot pronounce it beautiful. So far as it regards him, his argument is admitted, for beauty can have no abstract existence of its own, independent of a perceiving mind, and to the mind which cannot perceive, it can have no beauty whatever, because it cannot excite that emotion, to the cause of which, the term beautiful is applied; but when we talk of general beauty, we do not mean, as I have already observed, what pleases any individual, or number of individuals, but what pleases the generality of mankind. And indeed it would be easy to shew, that a man must be perversely organized, who cannot be pleased with what is generally pleasing, if he has imbued his mind with the spirit of those principles that enable us to judge; for no natural endowments will enable us to determine, in all cases, that beauty which is the proper object of taste, without an acquaintance with those principles.

But as in most questions concerning the beauty of objects, we cannot make ourselves acquainted with the common feeling of mankind regarding it, we must necessarily have recourse to discussion, and discover, if we can, such of its qualities as are similar to other qualities in other objects; and having ascertained what emotions these other

qualities generally excite, draw our conclusions regarding the beauty of the object in question, from this analogy. This mode of investigation, however, is subject to many exceptions; for it will be found, when we come to treat of beauty, that the quality which pleases in one subject, will not please in another, and that the character of the impression which it makes will always be determined by the manner in which it affects and is affected by the aggregate of qualities with which it is combined. In these cases, discussion must be founded on our own feelings, and their testimony will generally be found faithful, and agreeing with that common feeling which is the true standard of taste, if they be improved by experience, and disciplined by long habits of investigation and comparison. If we have once brought our feelings to agree with the general feeling, in all matters where this general feeling can be ascertained, it is reasonable to suppose, that they will agree with it also in matters where it is not yet discovered.

From what has been advanced in this chapter, we are naturally led to the following conclusions: 1. That the common feeling of mankind is the true standard of taste; 2. That whatever is acknowledged as beautiful by the writers of all ages and nations, is to be regarded as the voice of this common feeling; 3. That in determining any point

concerning which the writers of different ages and nations have expressed no opinion, we must have recourse to discussion and investigation, it being, if not a certain, at least the most certain mode of becoming acquainted with the common feeling; 4. That this discussion must deduce all its conclusions from the laws of feeling alone, and not from any abstract positions which, though true in themselves, and as they regard their proper objects, have no relation to the sympathies, sensibilities, or affections of man; and lastly, that whenever we can ascertain the common feeling without discussion, we may, without further investigation, rest upon it, with as much certainty as upon the axiom, that the whole is greater than any of its parts. All further discussion is impertinent, if its aim be to prove the common feeling wrong; but if it only seek to analyze and resolve into its component parts the individual elements of beauty, by which this common feeling was excited, the object of its investigation is highly laudable, and the surest means of advancing the Fine Arts to their last perfection.

CHAP. IV.

On the Taste of particular Ages and Nations; and the necessity of studying the Ancient Models.

THOUGH the common feeling of mankind is the true standard of taste, it is still certain, that the revolutions of taste are as constant and uniform as the revolutions of literature. New schools and new styles of poetry, painting, music, &c. are common to every age, and every revolution seems to receive the approbation of mankind. This general assent, however, to the innovations which eternally take place in taste, is rather apparent than real. We generally adopt the reigning taste, not because we prefer it to that of all former ages, but because, though we have sense to discern which is best when pointed out to us, we are generally too indolent to investigate or enter into comparisons ourselves; and we have seldom ability or inclination to contend with those who stand at the head of society, and influence it by their example. We, therefore, suffer ourselves to be led away, without examining, or without daring

to contend with the reigning taste. Many of us are credulous enough to believe, that whatever is fashionable must be right. This belief, however, is not founded on conviction; it does not result from comparing the prevailing taste with that of all former ages, but from entering into no comparison at all; from adopting implicitly what we are taught by those who set up for judges, and who affect to be better instructed in those matters, than we are ourselves. The taste that prevails in any particular age is not, therefore, to be considered as a taste founded on the common feeling of mankind. It is rather a taste forced upon this common feeling before those on whom it is forced have time to turn round and examine its propriety. It is, therefore, only the taste of those who usurp to themselves the privilege of directing the public taste, and who claim a right to make what alterations they please in that which had been adopted by their predecessors. The greater part of mankind do not take the trouble of inquiring whether this taste be correct or not, but blindly adopt whatever is generally adopted by others. There are, however, a few in every country who always venture to judge for themselves, who compare this novel taste with that of all former ages and nations, and who have courage to expose whatever they find in it false, affected, or unnatural; and such is the force of

truth, that it brings back the common feeling to the path from which it had strayed, and rescues it from the false biasses of ignorance and error. This redemption, however, could never take place, if the common feeling could not discern between true and false taste; or if it were as much disposed to adopt one as the other; for, in this case, it could never decide between them. Though the false taste, therefore, from which it is thus redeemed should even have been extremely popular, and from this circumstance might be supposed founded on the common feeling, it is obvious that this arose from the want of investigation, from not comparing the taste which it had thus implicitly adopted, in obedience to the authority of those whom it thought qualified to judge and to direct, with any other standard. But the moment the comparison was made, it had no difficulty in deciding. No argument can, therefore, be drawn from the false taste which may prevail in any age or nation, against the competency of the common feeling to determine all disputes in matters of taste; for this common feeling may remain dormant, and blindly adopt any taste without examination. "Whole nations," says Dr. Reid, "by the force of prejudice, are brought to believe the greatest absurdities; and why should it be thought that the taste is less capable of being perverted than the judgment? It must, indeed, be acknow-

ledged, that men differ more in the faculty of taste, than in what we commonly call judgment, and therefore it may be expected, that they should be more liable to have their taste corrupted in matters of beauty and deformity, than their judgments in matters of truth and error. If we make due allowance for this, we shall see that it is as easy to account for the varieties of taste, though there be in nature a true standard of beauty, and consequently of good taste, as it is to account for the variety and contrariety of opinions, though there be in nature a standard of truth, and consequently of right judgment."

Bad taste, false sentiment, and inconclusive reasoning, belong not more to one age or nation than another. They are the growth of every age, nor is there any period in which their influence is more to be dreaded than when that last polish is bestowed upon the fine arts, which they are capable of receiving from the exquisite touch of taste and genius. It is easier for a writer of ordinary merit to distinguish himself by vitiating taste, and opposing excellence, than by attempting to improve it; for how can he improve beauties which he cannot discern? Beauty, like ivory, after receiving the last polish, is only dulled by the unskilful hand that would attempt to render it more transparent. Hence it is that bad taste and false sentiment are more dangerous, when

the arts are brought to their greatest perfection, than in their progress to excellence; and for similar reasons, more dangerous in those arts that admit of highest perfection, as music, poetry, and painting, than in those which are incapable of such excellence. If, then, science had not endowed a few of her votaries with the faculty of discerning and plucking up the diseased seeds of false taste and erroneous sentiment, they would soon corrupt the whole mass of polite literature and the arts, and nothing but intellectual misrule and confusion would ensue.

These observations, if they be founded in truth, should naturally prompt us to look with a jealous and suspicious eye on the taste of our own age and country, particularly when it differs from those polished eras in the history of literature, in which taste and refined sentiment are universally acknowledged to have reached their greatest height.

Many writers of the last and present century seem to think, that when the mind is once sufficiently furnished with ideas, common sense, or the light of nature, will sufficiently direct us afterwards, without precedent or example; that the taste or practice of others should not be a standard to regulate ours; that the laws laid down by critics are arbitrary, and often calculated to mislead us; that there is no reason

why we should follow the example of Homer, or the precepts of Aristotle; and that we should always give free scope to the direction which our own genius loves to pursue; that it is too humiliating to the pride of human intellect, to be indebted to the knowledge or the acquirements of others. They affect to throw a false lustre over the dignity of human nature, and to invest it with powers and in-born resources of its own, which enable it to penetrate not only into all the mysteries of science, but into all the secrets of feeling and sentiment. To be indebted to others, or to be fettered by their opinions or sentiments, is, in their opinion, to impose restrictions on that "vital spark of heavenly flame," which should see every thing by its own light, and which will not tamely bend to such inglorious bondage. To the blind professor of such a creed, we may properly address that beautiful apostrophe of Pope:

> Go, wondrous creature, mount where Science guides,
> Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
> Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
> Correct old time, and regulate the sun;
> Go, soar with Plato to th' empyreal sphere,
> To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
> Go, teach eternal wisdom how to rule,
> Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!

A French poet, M. Millevoye, availing himself of this doctrine, at present so popular and so fashion-

able in France, commences his *Discours en vers sur l'indépendance de l'homme de lettres*, a work which has been honoured with a prize by the Imperial Institute of France, with these lines,

> La noble indépendance est l'ame des talens,
> Rien ne peut du génie enchaîner les élans.

According to this writer, the very *essence* of genius consists in independence, in acknowledging no submission to rule or authority; but it is certain, that a man may possess the most independent spirit, without a spark of genius. Those who have most profoundly investigated the limits and capacity of the human understanding have always acknowledged that men of genius are exceedingly few in all ages, and if only these few possess independent minds, the great bulk of mankind are a herd of slaves. In my opinion, M. Perrault has more happily, more poetically, and more philosophically described genius, when he calls it,

> ——————— Ce feu, cette divine flamme,
> L'esprit de notre esprit, et l'ame de notre ame.

The spirit of modern philosophy on the continent, claims a liberty of free-thinking in matters of taste, as well as in matters of science. Madame de Staël, and those of her school, will not allow the Greek writers, in particular, to possess that

analyzing, discriminating perception, which, according to her, has been continually improving, and will continue to improve, until it reaches perfection. This doctrine can only excite the smile of the philosopher, or indeed of any man who asks himself—what Madame de Staël certainly never asked herself—in what perfection consists, as applied to reason? If it be that knowledge of things from which nothing is hid, human reason cannot be perfect till it becomes omniscient; in which case man will be as wise as God himself; but if it be confined to certain limits, no matter how far these limits are extended, it must necessarily be ignorant of whatever is placed beyond them, and consequently imperfect. Madame de Staël means, therefore, either that human reason will become omniscient, or otherwise she is ignorant of what she means by the perfection of human reason; and if so, how fruitless is it to seek for arguments, and collect facts, to prove a position which she does not understand. Knowledge cannot be perfect unless it be infinite, and as infinite knowledge can belong only to God, it is impossible to divine in what that perfection consists which human knowledge is destined to attain.

It is obvious, however, that her doctrine has led her to place the present above all former ages, in the faculty of distinguishing and resolv-

ing into their individual elements all the principles of human knowledge. If this doctrine be founded in truth, it is certain that we have no right to consult the ancients in matters of taste; nor to attach much importance to the progress which they have made in the fine arts. The progress of taste must necessarily be promoted by the progress of knowledge, and if our reason be more improved than that of all former ages, our taste must also be more chaste and elegant; so that instead of consulting ancient authorities, we are an authority in ourselves.

Madame de Staël, however, does not venture to maintain, that our taste will keep pace with our knowledge; but as it is certain, that if we excel in the powers of analyzing and combining, we must also excel in delicacy and correctness of taste, she thought it wiser, no doubt, to insinuate such a doctrine, than to maintain it openly. On the subject of feeling and sensibility, however, she expresses herself without disguise, and not only makes us infinitely superior to the ancients, but denies they possessed the smallest portion of either. To assert this, is obviously to assert, that they were devoid of taste, and that consequently the models of classic beauty which they have left us, are unworthy our imitation. Devoid of sensibility, they could not originally acquire a correct taste; because originally no human

culture can supply its want. If then, as Madame de Staël wishes to shew, the ancients were totally devoid of sensibility, it necessarily follows that they were devoid of taste; and this obviously is the consequence which she wished to deduce from it. Had she advanced her opinions, however, with more modesty and with less confidence in her own powers, had she reflected that notwithstanding the brilliancy of her talents, her authority would not of itself give credence to a hypothesis formed for no other purpose than that of propping a novel theory, while it lay exposed to that scepticism and passion for analyzing and investigating every subject of inquiry that characterises the present age, she might perhaps have succeeded better in gaining converts to her creed; but the character she gives the ancients is too palpably gross to impose for a moment on the credulity of her readers. "The ancients," she says, "only required of others to refrain from injuring them, and simply desired them not to interfere in their pursuits, that they might be left to nature and themselves; but the moderns, endowed with softer sentiments, solicit assistance, support, and that interest which their situation inspires." How unlike the character of the ancients is this dissocial principle: if it could even be shewn that they were all savages, it would not follow even from this that their man-

ners were less social than ours: on the contrary, nothing can be more certain than that the social principle prevails most where the arts and sciences have made least progress. It is in such countries alone that the heart gives full expression to all its passions and affections. No refined disguise conceals the latest sentiments of the soul; and in proportion as they are destitute of taste, they are more keenly and vividly susceptible of that pleasure of which taste professes to be in pursuit. The man of taste is always storing his mind with those models of grace and beauty, which are calculated to impart the most refined delight; but from the habit of recognizing and seeking for faults as well as beauties, he scarcely ever enjoys that pleasure which he so anxiously seeks after, because he can never perceive any object in which he does not perceive, or fancy that he perceives, some deviation from the line of beauty. To be pleased with such an object, would, in his estimation, argue a vitiated taste, and as he can find no object perfectly beautiful, judging of it even according to his imperfect ideas of perfection, he remains always dissatisfied. He is therefore more dissocial, more fastidious, and more difficult to be pleased, than he who only looks to the bright side of every object, that is, who only looks to what is beautiful in an object, and wisely keeps all its other qualities out of sight. This is

true philosophy, so far as regards the pleasure which we naturally seek for in contemplating the works of nature or of art. We are imperfect ourselves; and he who has most to boast of, has his imperfections and frailties thick upon him. If, then, we will not be pleased with any thing in which we can descry a fault, we need never hope to enjoy that pure and unmingled pleasure which is naturally sought after in the works of taste. There is no object in the creation perfectly beautiful, for, as I have already observed, this perfection belongs only to the Deity. No wonder, then, that pride should, of all other vices, be the most detestable in the sight of God, because no other vice so strongly disposes mankind to look with contempt on whatever is marked with the characters of imperfection. True taste, however, consists, as I have shewn in the last Chapter, in approving of every object in which the characters of beauty prevail more than those of deformity; and he who will be pleased with nothing that falls short of perfection, cannot possibly be pleased while he is a habitant of the earth, and necessarily converts his present existence into a sort of purgatory. At any rate it is certain, that all those who *profess* to be men of taste and knowledge, are not the most social and communicative in their manners; and therefore Madame de Staël should not have represented the ancients as dis-

social beings—if they even wanted that discriminating perception and expansive range of idea which she confers exclusively on the moderns.

The female sex have naturally more sensibility than men; but even this privilege is denied them by Madame de Staël, in ancient times; for she tells us "their minds were not furnished with a single idea that could distinguish them from the brute creation, nor were they enlightened by one generous sentiment. This circumstance," she adds, "was the cause why the ancients represented in their tender scenes merely sensations."

Whoever traces the character of Hector through the Iliad, will surely admit, that Homer could paint something beyond mere sensations. I doubt whether a nobler portrait has ever been designed or executed by the pencil of genius, or whether it is possible to blend in human nature, more exalted courage with more tender sensibilities, or more exorable and sympathizing affections. It is said that the character of Achilles is the boldest that has ever been sketched by the pencil of genius; but how much more genius did it require to paint that of Hector, who united in himself all the mingled qualities of the warrior and of the man. His courage is not rendered effeminate by those softer and more amiable virtues of the heart, which throw

such lustre and repose over his character, notwithstanding the turbulent and restless life, into which he was dragged by the miseries of his country, nor do his virtues receive the slightest tincture of harshness, or severity, from those daring and death-dispensing energies which he was so frequently obliged to call into action. Every quality we can trace in him is great and exalted, but this greatness is always mingled with clemency, forgiveness, tenderness, and that noble generosity or magnanimity of soul, which places him above all the heroes which true or fabulous history has ever described. What an amiable picture does Helen give us of this hero in her lamentation over his corse, though he always censured his brother Paris for his intrigue with that fatal beauty. This lamentation will be found to express something beyond mere sensations, and she who could express them must surely be allowed to possess ideas that distinguished her from the irrational brute.

Ah dearest friend! in whom the gods had join'd
The mildest manners with the bravest mind;
Now twice ten years (unhappy years) are o'er
Since Paris brought me to the Trojan shore.
Oh, had I perish'd ere that form divine
Seduced this soft, this easy heart of mine.
Yet was it ne'er my fate from thee to find
A deed ungentle, or a word unkind:

When others cursed the authoress of their woe,
Thy pity check'd my sorrows in their flow;
If some proud brother eyed me with disdain,
Or scornful sister with her sweeping train,
Thy gentle accents soften'd all my pain.
For thee I mourn, and mourn myself in thee,
The wretched source of all this misery.

Agreeable to the tenderness of his nature, is the greatness and generosity that characterize his courage. When Ajax dares him to single combat with a harshness and abruptness characteristic of that warrior, he is neither intimidated by his threats, nor provoked to anger by the uncourteousness of his address, but preserving that generosity and greatness of soul which forgive even the faults of an enemy, he nobly replies,

O son of Telamon, thy country's pride!

* * * * * *

Me as a boy, or woman, wouldst thou fright,
New to the field, and trembling at the fight?
Thou meet'st a chief deserving of thy arms,
To combat born, and bred amidst alarms;
I know to shift my ground, remount the car,
Turn, charge, and answer every call of war;
To right, to left, the dextrous lance I wield,
And bear thick battle on my sounding shield.
But open be our fight, and bold each blow,
I steal no conquest from a noble foe.

Are such great and generous sentiments as these to be called mere sensations? and are we to prefer Madame de Staël's gloomy sensibility to the

animated, but tender sympathies, that are developed in the works of Homer, Virgil, Horace, and many of the ancient writers? Madame de Staël has evidently taken her ideas of sensibility from the character of Rousseau, of whom she is a professed admirer. She will not therefore permit any person to possess feeling, who is not gloomy or melancholy. "Happy," she says, "is the country where the authors are *melancholy*, the merchants satisfied, the rich *gloomy*, and the middling classes of people contented." If these gloomy ideas of feeling were to be adopted in this country, a complete revolution would take place in *taste*, and the ancient models would be no longer regarded as worthy of imitation. And indeed Madame de Staël is careful to encourage such a revolution among us, for she compliments us highly on the gloominess of our character;—she is enraptured with Ossian, though she finds nothing in Homer above other great men, considers his observations always superficial, but cannot sufficiently praise the gloominess of Ossian, whose monotony she labours to defend, by saying, "when we are enervated, the fault is not to be attributed to the poetry, but to the susceptibility and weakness of our organs. What we experience at that time is not a disgust, but the fatigue of a pleasure too long continued." This defence is sophistical; for though pleasure too

long continued, will undoubtedly fatigue us, it still remains to be shewn, why ten pages of Ossian fatigue us more than thirty in Homer.—"The Italians," she says, "would possess dignity, if there was any thing gloomy or melancholy in their character. It is to the English alone she is willing to grant this enviable melancholy, in its greatest perfection, for she says, that none of the Greek tragic writers 'equalled the perfection of the English writers in displaying melancholy emotions and the extent of human woe.'" I am, however, inclined to think, that Madame de Staël is mistaken in her character of the English writers. They have, no doubt, been successful in describing melancholy sensations; but have they not been equally successful in describing all the other affections and sympathies of the soul. They did not, therefore, give a decided preference to gloomy subjects, and he who of all English writers has best described the nature of philosophic melancholy, has not been less happy in his portrait of joy and festivity. I allude to the Allegro and Penseroso of Milton. I must confess myself one of those who never admired the poems of Ossian. In Fingal and Temora, every thing is dark, gloomy and dreadful, because the writer eternally labours to surprise and astonish us. His great ambition is to be sublime, and accordingly he always takes care to present himself in

the limbs and habiliments of a giant. That he should excite the admiration of his readers is not therefore surprising; but this admiration is seldom mingled with that more congenial, and more kindred pleasure, which is found in the softer and familiar scenes of private life. Even when a tender scene is met with in Ossian, there is a certain gloom that hangs around it: it never smiles on us with the smile of pleasure; it never cheers us with the delights of anticipated enjoyment. It is true, he is often as tender and pathetic as a melancholy man can be; but, inexorable to the cheering influence of social happiness, to the genial thrill of joy "and unreproved pleasures," he has worked himself into a certain intellectual gloom, which renders the authenticity of the poems themselves extremely doubtful, as such brooding melancholy could not be natural to the most desponding of the Celtic bards. We can therefore account for it only by supposing, that M'Pherson himself was the author of these poems, and that he preserved a strain of melancholy throughout, the better to support a borrowed character. By pursuing one, uniform strain of feeling and sentiment, he painted only one trait in the character of the ancient Celts, and as this perhaps was the most prominent feature in it, it would be more difficult to shew, that his work contained sentiments, or notions, that did not belong to the

people whom he described; whereas, by painting all the diversified feelings, passions, and propensities of the human heart, he could scarcely avoid giving expression to notions and sentiments which might be found at variance with the real character and manners of the people whom he described. It may be said, that this perennial opacity of soul was inspired by the kindred gloom of the Highland scenes, where Ossian was first enraptured with the visions of poetry; but when we look to the character of the present Scots, and perceive that they are as happy, as lively, as cheerful, and as social in their manners, as any other people in Europe, we must hesitate before we admit, that this conjecture sufficiently accounts for Ossian's melancholy gloom. Dr. Blair, indeed, endeavours to defend this character of Ossian's poetry, by telling us "*that tender melancholy is often an attendant on great genius.*" But though this will be easily granted, it is still certain, that no one opens his heart more to the ecstatic delights of pleasure, than he who is most susceptible of this tender melancholy. The degree of melancholy is always proportioned to a certain degree of happiness which we have lost, or of which we believe ourselves capable, if permitted to enjoy it; but the degree of happiness itself varies with our susceptibility of joy and pleasure. The more exquisitely the soul is alive to the emo-

tions of joy, the more deeply does she lament the absence of these emotions. Hence it is, that he who is incapable of high delights, is also incapable of deep affliction; for how can a man express a tender regret for a happiness that never expanded his indurated feelings, or poured on his soul those blissful tumults, and romantic associations, which peculiarly belong to poetic minds? He who has never felt these softer raptures, has never been favoured, if I mistake not, with the glowing ardour of poetic enthusiasm. It will, therefore, be generally, if not universally found, that he who "*best can paint*" the emotions of tender melancholy, will be found most capable of giving expression to the exquisite sensibilities of rapture and delight; and had the author of "Penseroso" never written his "Allegro," yet a knowledge of human nature might convince us, that no other could be better qualified for the task. Hence it may be presumed, without much scepticism, that if Ossian was the author of the poems attributed to him, the same susceptibility of impressions that taught him to paint the emotions of melancholy gloom, would have led him, in some of his minor poems, at least, to give expression to the higher raptures of ecstatic joy. Light-haired Fancy, that enchanting goddess, without whose propitious presence no man can be a poet, "borne by the frolic wind that breathes the spring,"

would have visited him, at one time or other, in the course of his poetic effusions, and poured into his melancholy soul the balsam of rapt ecstasy, and enthusiastic delight. Can it be supposed, that Ossian, who lived in a community as yet in the state of nature, a state in which the heart yields without resistance to every impulse of joy and happiness, would have wrapped himself up in solitary gloom, and resisted the inspiring call of pleasure, when he heard

> ——— The ploughman, near at hand,
> Whistle o'er the furrowed land,
> And the milkmaid singing blithe,
> And the mower whet his scythe,
> And every shepherd tell his tale
> Under the hawthorn, in the dale;

Or when he saw

> Many a youth and many a maid
> Dancing in the checquer'd shade;
> And young and old come forth to play
> On a sunshine holiday.

Human nature is always the same under similar circumstances, and we know, that rural subjects have been always the theme of the ancient poets, who wrote while society was as yet unacquainted with commerce, civilization, and the fine arts, and capable only of relishing natural enjoyments.

But whoever was the writer of the poems ascribed to Ossian, certain it is, that the taste which

prefers a melancholy gloom to the genial pleasures of nature, ought to be guarded against by all who would possess a pure, chaste, and elegant taste. We were created to be happy, even in this stage of existence, and all our organs of sensation are admirably formed to promote that end. How much more divine, then, is the philosophy of the inspired penman who says, "*a joyful mind maketh age flourishing, a sorrowful spirit drieth up the bones.*"* Indeed I apprehend this melancholy is confined to the French philosophers themselves, and that it is one of the blessings which has emanated from the French Revolution.

M. Suard's opinions on this subject seem to be directly opposed to Madame de Staël's, but they are still more unintelligible and absurd. It is remarkable, however, that the same desire of raising the character of the moderns appears equally prominent in both. In his *Notice sur la Vie et les Ecrits de Vauvenargues*, he acknowledges that "the writers of the age of Lewis XIV. have not been equalled, and that they have left far behind them all who have attempted to follow them in the same literary career." Who, then, can understand him when he says, that the eighteenth century surpasses all former ages "*par le perfectionnement du gout, et les créations du génie,*

* Proverbs, c. xvii, v. 22.

in the perfection of taste, and the creations of genius." Voltaire, however, for some time before his death, acknowledged with pain, that poetry had no charms for the age, and was no longer read. The same truth is confessed over and over by M. de La Harpe, in his *Cours de Littérature*; and Madame de Staël herself, in spite of her favourite doctrine of perfectibility, avows, that the present state of the French, is "le plus affreux période de l'esprit public, l'égoïsme de l'état de nature, combiné avec l'active multiplicité des intérêts de la société, la corruption sans politesse, la grossiéreté sans franchisse, la civilization sans lumières, l'ignorance sans enthousiasme."

There appears to be some difficulty in reconciling these acknowledgments with that perfection of taste, and those creations of genius which French writers have arrogated to themselves during the last sixty years; and though we are, perhaps, somewhat more modest in our pretensions, it is certain that, like the modern French writers, many of us rather tolerate than admire our predecessors. We begin to look upon Addison, Pope, and Dryden as mere versifiers, and the classical school which they established, as the school of pedantry and inelegant correctness. The delusive theories that have appeared within the last ten years on this subject, would require a volume in itself to place their absurdity in a proper light. An Essay on Modern Literature is,

perhaps, of all other works, the most wanting at the present moment; if undertaken not only by a writer of talent, but a writer who could place himself above the prejudices of his age and country. We are told that he who does not think and judge for himself, regardless of what others have thought and judged before him, must resign all claims to refined taste, and originality of thought and expression. Nature is now looked up to as the only guide; for the taste of our predecessors is too correct to be imitated. Correctness, regularity, order, and precision are identified with cumbrous pedantry and inelegant formality, while nothing but a wild, unsanctified, and romantic licentiousness are held up to public admiration. We are taught to trust entirely to our own powers, and to consult nature and our own genius alone. In consulting nature, we are told, that we go to the fountain-head at once, where Truth presents herself in her naked simplicity, neither clothed in the false robes of specious representations, nor disguised among the distinctions of scholastic subtleties. No doubt, if we could consult nature, we should act unwisely to have recourse to the fallible tribunal of human judgment; but I would ask these fond disciples of nature, where is she to be consulted? What certainty have we, that what we consult, when we imagine we are consulting Nature, is not a mere creature of our own imagination, of whom Nature

knows nothing? Nature is always whatever we please to make of her. She accommodates herself to all our reasonings; she confirms all our conclusions; and she gives the appearance of truth and reality to the most delusive images that ever wantoned amid the creations of a romantic mind. To what purpose is it that we should pretend to consult nature, unless we bring with us a mind capable of pursuing her through, and detecting her in, all the varied and Proteus forms which she assumes. Nature has nothing defined in her character by which she may be known: what is nature in one subject of inquiry is not nature in another; and new energies and applications of mind are always necessary to trace and recognize her in each. To say that Nature cannot mislead us, that her dictates are always true, that truth itself consists in a knowledge of her properties, and the laws by which they are governed, is literally saying nothing. That Nature cannot mislead us I am willing to allow; but the difficulty still remains of knowing whether it be nature that directs us. Nature, as I have just observed, becomes whatever we choose to make of her; and the most absurd reasoner thinks he is guided by right principles, that is, that he is guided by nature, when he has strayed as far from her standard as the obvious perceptions of common sense will permit him. The dic-

tates of nature, then, I grant, are always true, but how are we to become acquainted with them? how are we to know, that what we take for the dictates of nature, are not the dictates of our own erring and fallible perceptions? It avails us but little to know, that truth consists in a knowledge of the properties of nature, and the laws by which these properties are governed, unless it can be shewn, that every man has, within himself, faculties that enable him to take cognizance of these properties, and to observe these laws. How limited our capacities are in this respect, every one knows, who knows any thing of physics, or the philosophy of the human mind. Of the real nature and causes of things we know absolutely nothing. The essence of matter, and consequently of nature, is as much concealed from our view as the essence of spirit. Whatever we know of either, is through such of their qualities as present themselves to our observation; but we neither know the entire of the qualities or properties that belong to any subject, nor do we know why even such qualities as we notice in it, should belong to it rather than others; for one quality does not necessarily suppose another. Fire is red and hot, but redness does not suppose heat: snow is white and cold, but whiteness does not imply cold. Besides, we know not why fire should be either red or hot, snow either cold or white. The greater

part of our knowledge in natural philosophy is owing to chance or experiments. Our own unaided faculties could never explore what these experiments have made known to us, and all mankind would be ignorant of them to this day, were it not for the few who made the experiments. What, then, would our boasted faculties avail us in consulting Nature, with regard to the knowledge for which we are indebted to these few? We might consult her to eternity, but she never would reply; or if she did, it would be only to deceive us. It is not Nature, however, that would deceive us, but that prostitute goddess which we set up in her place, and which we had mistaken for her. Would Nature ever have told us, that the magnet has the property of attracting iron, if chance had not revealed it to us? Our ignorance of cause and effect is equally great. We trace effects to their immediate causes: these again we find to be the effects of other causes, and so we run through the chain of causes and effects, till we come to the most general; but here we must rest; so that the sources of all human knowledge are concealed from us in mystery and darkness. How many surprising effects result from the law of gravitation; but who can explain the cause of this gravitation, which is itself the effect of some other cause, and the cause of so many other causes and effects? Shall we con-

sult Nature on the subject? Newton consulted her many years to no purpose; for though he guessed at a cause, he was himself doubtful of its truth, and his followers seem still more doubtful of it than himself. We see, then, how little those writers know of Nature, who maintain, that she should be our only guide, and that, as Mr. Knight expresses it, "the arts of rhetoric or criticism will never give the orator or author, memory to retain, or judgment to select, though they may teach him to abuse both by substituting fashion to feeling, artifice to nature, and affectation to simplicity." If nature vouchsafed to instruct us, all would be well; but it does not appear, that she is always disposed to answer our interrogations; and even when she does, we are still left in the same dilemma, for, except in cases of demonstrative evidence, what certainty have we, that nature has spoken the truth, or rather, that it is nature that has spoken at all? If Sir Isaac Newton's conjecture regarding the cause of gravitation be true, nature instructed him aright; and yet, while it remains a conjecture, while we have no certainty of its truth, we know not whether Sir Isaac was instructed by nature or not, though we well know that he frequently consulted her on the subject.

Our acquaintance with nature is, therefore, extremely limited; and, even limited as it is, we

owe almost the whole of this scanty portion to the labours, the researches, and the investigation of others, as well our contemporaries as those who have gone before us. Each of them discovered but little, it is true, when compared to the extent of science; and even this little he would not have discovered, had he not first made himself acquainted with whatever knowledge he could collect from the writings of others, and thus qualified himself for the arduous task of consulting Nature, in ascertaining such of her laws as had not been already satisfactorily explained by others; and also of knowing whether it was Nature that spoke to him, whenever he addressed her, or the specious deductions of inconclusive reasoning. He who brings a mind, enriched with the knowledge acquired from men and books, to the contemplation of Nature, will view her with other eyes than the man whose presumptuous confidence in his own powers refuses to receive instruction from any other source. There can, indeed, be no doubt, but that he who indiscriminately adopts the doctrines and opinions of others will fill his head with innumerable errors; but he who cannot discriminate in these matters, will derive little advantage from consulting nature. The reason is obvious;—all the erroneous opinions adopted by writers, and circulated through books, were, as

they imagined themselves, suggested by nature. It is, then, but reasonable to suppose, that nature, or what we are pleased to designate by that name, would suggest erroneous opinions to us, as well as to them, and it is a thousand times more likely, that we should give these errors credit, when stamped with her supposed authority, particularly as we see nothing that lessens the apparent evidence which they bring with them, than if we met with them in books. The errors met with in books, are not of so dangerous a character: in the first place, we know they were men like ourselves by whom they were written, for, if we were credulous enough to believe them infallible, their own contentions and disputes would soon undeceive us. This knowledge produces a degree of salutary scepticism, which prevents us from giving implicit credence to their opinions;—and, in the second place, when we suspect any opinion to be erroneous, we have generally the satisfaction of finding our suspicions confirmed or removed in some other work. There is as little reason to suppose, that all writers would conspire to deceive us, as that all mankind would conspire to deceive each other. It is books, therefore, that enable us to correct, not only their own errors, but the errors which we imbibe ourselves from consulting nature; whereas Nature herself, or

rather that idol which we set up in her place, so far from correcting, only confirms us in all the opinions that are sanctioned by her authority.

It appears to me, therefore, that the doctrine which teaches us to trust more to our own powers, and the light of Nature, than to those who studied Nature chiefly through the medium of books, is extremely erroneous, and calculated to procure credence for all the delightful, but delusive images which fancy can create, or to which imagination can give "a local habitation and a name." He who studies Nature without examining or caring how she presents herself to other people, or what kind of emotions or perceptions her various appearances excite in their minds, only knows how Nature and his own constitution stand affected with regard to each other. It is certain, then, that if his natural temper, or feelings, differ from those of others, nature will affect him differently from them, and his representations must accordingly present a different portrait of her from what would be exhibited by a writer who knew not merely how she was apt to affect himself, but how she was apt to affect the generality of mankind; a knowledge to be derived only from books. The great error consists in supposing, that he who studies books, neglects Nature altogether, whereas no one contemplates her under more various forms. Every sentence he reads in a book gives

him an opportunity of examining, whether the thought, or sentiment, conveyed in it, be agreeable to nature; that is, whether it be agreeable to his own view of the question; for, ultimately, the study of nature means nothing more than this:—Let us study nature for ever, and the certainty of our knowledge can never rise higher than the certainty of our own conclusions regarding things. He, then, who studies books, has the advantage of studying nature at every sentence he reads: every time he doubts the sense of his author, he studies her as rigidly, and perhaps more so, than he who discards books altogether, and trusts to her alone; for in doubting the sense of his author, he immediately sets himself to study nature;—that is, he compares the sense of his author with his own view of the question, and this latter view is all that is meant, or at least all that can be meant, when rigidly examined, by studying nature. The man, then, who studies nature alone, and contemns authority, studies her only once; that is, he only knows the opinion which he has formed of her himself;—but the man who studies her through books, studies her over and over, and may be said to sift her to the very bottom; because whatever subject is proposed to him, he not only knows what others have thought concerning it, but what he thinks himself, after consulting them all, and comparing each of their

opinions separately with his own. Besides, when we consult the opinions of others, we consult the opinions of those who consulted nature as well as ourselves; and we must, therefore, be always prepared to shew, that we are better qualified to consult her in resolving any question, than all the writers who have written on the subject already, before we assume it as a principle, that it is safer to consult nature alone, than be guided by writers whose knowledge was derived from accurate observation, extensive reading, and an acquaintance with the opinions and sentiments of all those who had been in the field of science before them.

Many of the French writers, who maintain that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries excel all former ages in "perfection of taste, and the creations of genius," have, no doubt, distinguished themselves by works that seem to captivate reason and hold investigation in chains. In reading them, our natural vanity is flattered, and all those propensities that lead to the gratification of our passions are agreeably indulged. *Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Helvetius,* are extolled to the heavens, while the writers who flourished in the reign of Louis XIV. writers whose very names do honour to literature—as *Corneille, Racine, Despreaux, Moliere, Fontaine, Fenelon, Quinault, Descartes, Huyghens,* and *Cassini,* though they are al-

lowed to possess great erudition, are looked upon as destitute of that refined taste and poetic enthusiasm which is so liberally granted to the disciples of nature. The latter are extolled because they are supposed to have derived their knowledge more immediately from nature; the former are allowed to possess learning, but no taste, as if taste was the gift of pure nature and instinct, that required not the informing guidance of cultivation and art. It must, however, be allowed, that the modern school of painting and statuary in France has produced no rivals to *Poussin, Le Sueur, Le Brun, Puget,* and *Girardon,* who flourished in the age of Louis XIV.; and I have much reason to suspect the purity of that taste which would prefer the gloomy genius of Helvetius, and Diderot, to those faithful portraits of nature which are to be met with in Moliere, Corneille, and Racine; portraits that represent man as he is, not as the dark and melancholy scepticism of modern philosophy would represent him. Few writers have been more favoured by nature than Rousseau; but his contempt for authority, and his firm reliance on his own powers, have bewildered him in the mazes of Utopian speculations. That Moliere, with all his learning and erudition, was not less studious of an acquaintance with simple, unsophisticated nature than her own boasted disciples, will appear from a well-known circumstance, that he

read all his comedies to an old servant-maid, named *Laforet*, and corrected every passage that did not seem to excite in her that emotion which it was intended to produce. Racine yields not to any writer of the eighteenth century in refined wit and delicacy of taste; and though Corneille was less solicitous of ornament, he was not less true and natural in his portraits of human life. Fontaine, Boileau, and Fenelon, were learned, but their learning did not vitiate their taste: there is rather every reason to believe that it improved it in no small degree. Shakspeare is an illustrious example how much natural genius stands in need of being guided by the best models and standards of elegance. Perhaps neither Homer, Virgil, nor Milton, possessed a genius equal to Shakspeare; but many writers since his time, without any pretensions to original genius, and but slightly gifted with talent, would blush at the grossness and indelicacy of taste, that characterize all his dramatic works. Yet nothing can be more certain, than that his want of taste did not arise from want of exquisite feeling and sensibility, but from want of a more extensive knowledge, and from trusting entirely to nature and his own unaided genius. Dryden is allowed to possess a genius superior to Pope; but his knowledge was more circumscribed, or if it was equally diffuse, it was not equally correct. He had not given himself

those habits of rigid and critical investigation, that detecting and exploring acumen that sought to be as well acquainted with the minuter elements of nature, as with the sublimer compages of creation. His taste is, therefore, less chaste, less elegant, and less refined; and though his works will be always read with admiration, they will never give that perennial and uninterrupted pleasure which is felt in perusing the works of his illustrious rival. Perhaps no writer, ancient or modern, possessed a more elegant taste than Pope: he is allowed to surpass Horace himself in the delicacy and refined turn of his satire; but it is well known, that no writer was a greater admirer of the ancients, no writer more desirous of being acquainted with the sentiments of others, before he ventured to give publicity to his own, and no writer a more zealous advocate for precedent and authority. If any of those who affect to despise precedent, and who think that nature alone should guide the poet, the painter, and the orator, could give purer specimens of classic taste than Pope has given, it would, perhaps, give their doctrine a degree of popularity, which it has not yet acquired in this country, except among the *naturals*, though it is extremely specious, and well calculated to flatter the vanity of man. The naturals, however, are extremely numerous in England, for the disciples of our

modern school, or schools of poetry may be all ranked in that class. Even some of our prose writers, who cannot, like the poets, claim any assistance from inspiration, seem inclined to enlist under their banners. Mr. Knight, in his "Principles of Taste," evinces very little respect for the rules of criticism, though, if he had not been himself critically versed in Greek and Roman learning, his observations on Dr. Blair's criticism, which I have already quoted, would appear less specious than they are, and less conclusive than they seem to be. Mr. Shee, in his "Elements of Art," a poem fraught with true poetic feeling, and the sterling enthusiasm of better days, has followed Mr. Knight, in adopting the same opinion. Having laid it down as a maxim, that

> Free-thinking is philosophy in taste,

he adds in a note, that, "in advocating the freedom of taste, he conceives, that he only asserts one of the intellectual rights of mankind, which can never be denied but by prejudice, or surrendered but by weakness. He acknowledges himself to be one of those who lament the long and general influence of precedent in literature and the arts: he would see, with pleasure, every poet invested with the privileges of Homer, and every painter as unshackled as Apelles; for intellectual freedom is as essential to the production of great

works, as political freedom to the performance of great actions. He knows of no good reason why the ancients should be suffered to set the fashions of our understandings; why we should continue to dress our heads in the glass of our ancestors, and fancy we possess their powers when we put on their airs. He cannot therefore applaud, with Pope, the poetical humility of the Mantuan muse; he finds himself irresistibly tempted to regret, that "young Maro" did not persist to think himself

> "————————Above the critic's law,
> And but from Nature's fountain scorn to draw."

Had he not unluckily discovered, that Nature and Homer were the same, instead of a servile imitation of the Mæonian bard, he might have given the world an original work, and furnished a precedent of intellectual independence, which would have been more useful to his Parnassian posterity than even the brilliant example of his genius."

What Mr. Shee means by *freedom* in taste, I am at a loss to know; and probably if I did, I should agree with him. If I understand freedom aright, there is none of it in taste: whatever pleases or displeases does so on principles that are immutably fixed in the nature of things; and whoever thinks he is at liberty to sport with these principles, to obey no law, to smile at the autho-

rity of those who have pleased mankind by their strict adherence to those laws, and to judge and think as he pleases, is greatly deceived. He may, indeed, invest himself with the privileges of Homer, or Apelles; he may view nature with his own eyes, if he has eyes to discern her, but if he has not, let him use the eyes of those who can see better than himself. Even in this case, however, it is always safer to see first with the eyes of others, because he will afterwards be sure of seeing better with his own. I regret with Mr. Shee, that poets and painters of genius do not assert its privileges more frequently than they do; but in assuming it, they must recollect, that they have no privilege of *free-thinking in taste*, for this is a privilege which neither Homer nor Apelles claimed, and if they had claimed it, their claims would have been rejected by mankind. If Homer or Apelles indulged this principle of free-thinking so far as to amuse the world with such descriptions and pictures as their own fancy suggested to them, without regarding what was best suited to the proper nature and character of man, their names would have descended into the same tombs with themselves. It is then by studying closely those immutable laws by which the feelings of man are gratified and pleased, that they have rendered themselves immortal. If we who follow them should claim an exemption from the

restrictions which these laws impose upon us, we may expect that short-lived fame which would have attended them had they insisted on the same privilege. It is then one thing to claim a freedom of opinion, in matters of taste, and another, not "to dress in the glass of our ancestors." We may not, if we please, (and if we can avoid it, without violating any law of reason or of feeling, we have the greater merit,) "dress in the glass of our ancestors;" we may be as original as we can in the selection and treatment of our matter, but this gives us no privilege of free-thinking in matters of taste. On the contrary, the less we consult them, the more assiduously and diligently must we consult nature. But to consult nature with success, I apprehend, we must frequently and diligently consult the great masters who have gone before us. If they themselves had not consulted their predecessors, they would never have distinguished themselves by their works; and we have little reason to hope, that nature has endowed us with that intellectual might and energy that will enable us to dispense with that assistance of which they were obliged to avail themselves, or that we can perceive, intuitively, *quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non*, without the trouble of inquiring what was deemed beautiful or ugly, fit or unfit by those who have preceded us. If, then, Virgil has lost by con-

sulting Homer, how much wiser and more learned should we be than we are at present, if the ancients were sufficiently aware of the advantages that would result from attending to nature only, and neglecting those treasures of knowledge that were already prepared for them by their predecessors. Virgil was not the only writer who had humility enough to profit by the works of those who were in the field of science before him; but if he and they would have succeeded better without it, what treasures of information would they have sent down to us, all of which, however, could be of no use, as we ourselves, as well as they, should spurn all obedience to precedent and authority. Virgil's example, however, has been followed by the greatest writers since his time. Horace imitated Anacreon, Simonides, Sappho, and Pindar; Cicero owes his immortality to the beauties of Grecian eloquence, which he studied with the greatest assiduity, and imitated with corresponding success, if that may be called imitation which is marked with all the characters of originality; Sallust was a professed imitator of Thucydides; Terence embellished his own language with all the graces of Menander. Among the French writers, who has less originality than Fontaine? He has scarcely invented any thing; yet no writer, ancient or modern, has impressed upon his works more genuine signatures of natural simplicity, and that ingenuous

naïveté which would seem attainable only by those who copy after nature alone. Every thing in Fontaine seems to be nature itself: we seem to read his own character in his works, so that, as a learned writer observes, he was as simple as the very heroes of his fable. It is well known, however, that he owes all his natural simplicity to the spirit of imitation. The works of Rabelais, Marot, and Urfé, were the sole delights of his youth, and to them he owes that agreeable ease, simplicity, and rural imagination, which characterize his works. Racine was not less an imitator than Fontaine, and owes much of his celebrity to the beauties of the Greek tragic writers; Corneille imitated Lucan and the Spanish poets; Boileau is a literal imitator of Horace; Montesquieu owes the best passages in his Spirit of Laws to Aristotle; nor is Rousseau, the child of nature, less indebted to Seneca and Montaigne. The English poets have not imitated less than the French, of which it is sufficient to mention Milton and Pope. "Milton," says Mr. Addison, "is every where full of hints, and sometimes literal translations taken from the greatest of the Greek and Latin poets." The imitations of Pope are known to every reader of English poetry. To follow nature, therefore, with success, I fear will be impracticable, and beyond the might of those intellectual powers which the Author of nature has granted to man, unless

we avail ourselves of all the light that can be derived from whatever is most excellent in ancient and modern literature, for, as Pope justly observes,

> "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
> As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance."

I must, therefore, confess I do not regret, with Mr. Shee, "the long and general influence of precedent in literature and the arts." On the contrary, if we once learned to despise this influence, I apprehend our literature and arts would soon dwindle into a sickly effeminacy. An affectation of novelty would vitiate their purity, and we should have to endure the canting tone of false simplicity, false sensibility, and of that turbid imagination which observes no law, which is guided by no landmark, which creates, invents, selects, and combines, without rule or standard, without attending to those laws by which the original archetypes in nature, from which she selects her ideal images, are immutably governed. A great portion of the original poetry that has lately issued from the London press, should serve to convince us, what the disciples of nature would effect, if they once succeeded in throwing aside the restraints of precedent and authority. They affect to despise the regular and classical harmony of Dryden, Addison, and Pope, in which they pretend to discover more appearance

of art, and more affectation of knowledge, than are consistent with the pure simplicity of nature. They want to cheat us into an opinion, that whatever we read should seem to have been written without study or reflection—the pure emanation of poetic sensibility, or divine inspiration. To avoid all appearance of art, therefore, they avoid all appearance of regularity, in their versification, and they exhaust their little home-spun genius in giving expression to such puerile reflections as would seem to have arisen in their minds without labour or research. Admirable disciples of nature! they teach us to think like children, and to express ourselves like fools. They have debased poetry into prose, to avoid regular measures; and they have rendered this poetic prose, or prosaic poetry, this amphibolous generation of dulness, perfectly unintelligible, lest they should seem to be acquainted even with the common structure of sentences—a knowledge which they, no doubt, imagine, would expose their having recourse to art, a practice so unworthy the disciples of nature, who should seem to be rather inspired than taught.

If nature were sufficient to guide us to excellence, why has every poet that ever attained to eminence, condemned the first effusions of his muse? Indeed it will be sufficient to ask, what qualities of excellence do we receive from the hand of nature, at this early period, to determine

the question? She gives us, it will be replied, a luxuriance of thought and imagination. Grant it; but does she not give us, at the same time, a licentiousness of style, a redundancy of expression, a love for false and gaudy embellishments, and an affectation of point and wit, whether they do or do not suit the subject of which we treat? And do not these qualities of excellence continue ever after to characterize our works, unless we chasten and purify them, by closely studying those models of excellence which are to be met with in works of established reputation? Did not these qualities always continue to vitiate the works of Shakspeare, because he had no models to imitate? thus shading the native splendour and purity of that genius which would have enabled him to outstrip all the poets of ancient and modern times, if he had received that last polish which only taste and culture can impart. Do not these deteriorating qualities render themselves manifest in the effeminate works of most of our modern poets, who affect to despise authority and precedent, to contemn that ardour which they cannot attain, and that rapidity of execution which they cannot emulate; in a word, who affect to pity that refined enthusiasm which approved of

> The varying verse, the full-resounding line,
> The long majestic march, and energy divine.

But, it will be asked, is there no room for originality, or is excellence unattainable, unless we adopt the style and the sentiments of our ancestors? To this I reply, that whoever would possess a chaste and refined taste, must certainly make himself acquainted with the purest models of excellence, which are only to be met with in those writers on whom mankind have conferred the meed of unfading merit. It does not follow, however, that this knowledge supposes a servile imitation, which is still more offensive than that misguided taste which characterizes the writings of those who have followed no model whatever. He who has genius will always appear original: for, having enriched his mind with the true spirit of fine writing, he has no longer occasion to look up to authority, but is now qualified to judge for himself. He becomes, in fact, an authority in himself; and while the disciples of nature are wandering without chart or compass to direct their flight, he stands on a proud and exalted eminence, whence he views, with unclouded perception, the goal for which he is bound, all the approaches that lead to it, and all the delusive paths that branch from it, and tempt him to deviate from his intended course. Such a man no longer needs authority to direct him; he thinks and judges for himself, because he has already learned to think and judge like those writers

whom he has so industriously studied, and whose principles he adopted as principles approved of and confirmed by the suffrages of mankind.

If the propriety of rejecting authorities that have been long venerated by mankind, were once admitted, it would necessarily follow, that all mankind have been deceived, in matters of taste;—that they have approved of, and derived pleasure from descriptions and passages which had neither intrinsic merit in themselves, nor contained those principles, sentiments, or portraits of beauty, which were calculated to impart pleasure to man, such as he is at present constituted. But if certain principles of taste and criticism, laid down by eminent writers, and stamped with the universal approbation of mankind, are not to be regarded as models, why have they given that very pleasure to the cause of which the term beautiful is applied? Why have mankind adopted them as principles that accorded with their own feelings and sentiments of beauty? To maintain, therefore, that the established rules of criticism and taste ought not to be followed or respected; that it is contrary to the freedom and independence of genius to pay a blind and servile submission to the restrictions which they would impose,—is, in other words, to maintain, that beauty does not consist in that which has given universal pleasure, but in that freedom and licen-

tiousness of imagination which obeys no rule, which regards no precept, which claims an indisputable right to deviate from every law by which the nature of man is governed, and to which he owes submission, and to spurn the control of those natural biasses which are so many laws, governing and influencing, at every moment, all his actions, by their secret but never-failing influence. It is idle to suppose, that any thing will appear beautiful to man, that does not seem to convey an idea of harmony or relation to something else; for the sense, or emotion of beauty, consists in a perception of harmony or agreement, as will hereafter appear. No truth can be better confirmed by experience, than that those who are least acquainted with the sentiments, principles, and opinions of men of taste, and writers of established, literary repute, are those who clamour most concerning the independence of genius, and who are most turbulent in rejecting the control of authority. Those who have ardently and incessantly toiled in the painful, though enchanting walks of literature, science, and the fine arts, and who have made themselves acquainted with the learning and the beauties of ancient and modern literature, are those who respect most the authority of great names, because they are best acquainted with their real and intrinsic merits; while those "maggots half-formed," who know nothing of the treasures of knowledge

that are contained, the principles of science that are laid down, and the elements of beauty that are developed in their works, but what they have collected from indexes or the criticisms which they have read on their writings, maintain, that it is forfeiting the native independence of the mind, to bend to their authority. But surely those self-sufficient gentlemen will allow, that it is not servile to bend to the authority of truth; and if those who have profitably toiled in pursuit of it, should, in many instances, discover the object of which they were in search, it is equally just and proper to bend to their authority. If those who are best acquainted with their writings, respect and reverence them, have we not reason to suspect that those who, while they scarcely know the titles of the different works which they have written, affect to despise them, are governed by a spirit which does little honour to the understanding of their heads, or the sincerity of their hearts? I am aware, indeed, that no one has a better right to cry out against authority, than he who has most reason to suspect the extent of his own knowledge, or the truth of his own arguments and sentiments; for, however he may flatter himself with that secret vanity that arises from the contemplation of his own talents, he has still some little fears, and I believe, in many cases, his fears are well founded, that he may unwarily glide into

error, from the fallibility of his nature, or betray his ignorance of general literature, from his limited acquaintance with the works of ancient and modern writers. It is therefore wise to cry out in time, and to spurn the authority of established names.

But let us suppose, for a moment, a writer who professes republican principles in literature and science, who maintains the native independence of the mind, and its right to expatiate at large, in the intellectual world, uncontrolled by precept, and unrestricted by example,—let us suppose him engaged in a work intended for the general use of mankind,—what, I would wish to know, can he advance, that is worthy of their attention, if it contradict the principles laid down already by writers of established reputation? If he be an original writer, it will be found, either that his originality arises from erroneous principles that have no existence in the nature of things, and agree only with the fantastic associations of his own distempered mind, or otherwise, that notwithstanding their originality, they contain nothing that is at variance with the works of those celebrated writers who have gone before him; and I doubt whether it is possible to adhere closely to nature, and write two successive pages of a work in which no trace of imitation will appear. The most learned writer imitates frequently

when he is not aware of it; but if he altered all the passages afterwards, in which he discovered any trace of imitation, it is not at all improbable but he would deviate as much from truth and nature, as he deviated from those whom he had undesignedly copied.

When Virgil first thought of writing an epic poem, he had, as may reasonably be presumed, and as Pope conjectures, sufficient confidence in his own powers to invent, select, arrange, combine, and conduct the work to the end, without consulting, or deriving any assistance, whatever, from the writings of his predecessors, with which, however, even the assertors of literary independence cannot think it servile that he should be acquainted; for if they themselves were ignorant of the celebrated writers who preceded them—if they were totally unacquainted with their thoughts and sentiments, or with the general tenor and spirit of their works—they would probably remain unnoticed and unknown among the herd of mankind, nor presume to spurn the authority of those names to whom, perhaps, they owe whatever little they possess of knowledge or of science. Virgil, then, though he was acquainted with the Iliad and Odyssey, spurned, no doubt, the idea of being indebted to Homer, and resolved to trust entirely to the resources of his own mind, in the completion of the Æneid. He chose, accordingly,

for the hero of his poem, a prince, whose character was the very reverse of that of Achilles; hoping that this adoption would enable him to steer clear of all imitation. The mildness and tenderness of his own feelings peculiarly corresponded to the character in which he depicted the Trojan chief; and throughout the whole of the poem, no two characters can be more clearly or distinctly different, than those of Achilles and the *Pius* Æneas. So far, then, Virgil was successful in attaining that originality of which he was ambitious. But as he proceeded in his work, he found he had no alternative but that of imitating Homer, or of departing from that line which his own genius would have pointed out to him, had such a poem as the Iliad never been written; for though the hero of his poem had scarcely a trait of character in common with Achilles, if we except his bravery, yet no diversity of character can prevent men from being frequently placed in similar circumstances, and engaged in the prosecution of similar designs; and he who would follow Nature, in disposing of circumstances and events, must necessarily place them so. If, then, there be one manner of combining and arranging these circumstances and designs better than another, and if Homer's genius pointed out to him that which was most natural, Virgil had no other alternative, if he avoided imitating Homer, but that of omit-

ting many incidents and events which would naturally occur to the principal characters in his Æneid, because similar incidents were related by Homer, and also of avoiding that manner of combining and arranging them which his own genius would have pointed out as the most natural, because, in adopting this natural manner, he would find himself approaching to, or imitating, that manner which Homer had adopted before him. As, then, similar events will frequently and naturally arise out of similar situations, and as one manner of combining and arranging is preferable to another, Virgil should give place to these events, and adopt this manner of conducting his poem, in which case he would imitate Homer; or by avoiding this imitation, in order to be original, he should give place to events that could not arise naturally from the supposed state of persons or things, and adopt a mode of arranging and combining them, that was contrary to the natural order and chain of events. Virgil, then, set out with an intention of being original, and spurning all imitation; but, finding, afterwards, that he should either imitate, or deviate from that line which nature had chalked out for him, he chose the former. In imitating Homer, however, he only pursued that path which he would have chosen had Homer never travelled in it before him. If Homer, indeed, had not pursued that plan, in

the treatment and conduct of the Iliad, which was most consistent with, and best suited to the natural order and series of events which he had to relate, Virgil, in imitating him, would evidently shew his want of taste, and his total ignorance of the laws which ought to be observed in the conduct and treatment of an epic poem. That Virgil would not have done so, is obvious from the critical correctness of his judgment, in which he was superior even to Homer himself. He imitates Homer only where circumstances, or natural coincidences, oblige him to it; for I doubt whether any passage can be discovered in the Æneid, from beginning to end, in which Virgil has digressed from his subject to make room for imitation. In those imitations, therefore, which natural coincidences forced upon him, he should be deemed as original as in all other parts of his work, even if it could be shewn, that he was not ignorant of the passages in Homer of which his was an imitation. He made use of these thoughts because no others could suit him so well, and because he thought Homer had no exclusive right to them. But how would he have been puzzled, and how frequently would he have been driven to express unnatural sentiments, if he had always avoided expressing what was natural, whenever Homer had said it before him. The more correctly any two men think, the more will they seem to imitate each other, when the subject

on which they express their sentiments is the same; and if Virgil, in order to avoid the possibility of imitating Homer, had placed all the characters in the Æneid in such situations as would present no reflection to them in common with the heroes of the Iliad, he would receive much more abuse from the disciples of nature for the invention of Quixotic characters and adventures, than he now does for imitating Homer. I cannot, however, see why a sentiment in Virgil which happens to be similar to a sentiment in Homer, should be called an imitation, unless it can be shewn, at the same time, that the subject did not naturally suggest the sentiment to Virgil, or that it evinced a depth or reach of mind of which Virgil was incapable; in which case it should be shewn, that nothing equal to it could be pointed out in those parts of the Æneid where no trace of imitation appeared. If any one imagine, that there is nothing to be met with in the Æneid that can equal the passages in which its author is supposed to have imitated Homer, he appears to me not to have sufficiently weighed the mind of the Roman poet. Virgil is quoted as frequently as Homer himself; and if he has not the daring boldness of the Mæonian bard, it is not because he wanted that energy of mind which could waft him safely through the wide empire of imagination, or exalt him to the highest summit of rational sublimity; but because his

judgment was more correct than that of Homer, and he suffered no idea to enter into his most sublime descriptions, that did not logically and philosophically correspond with those conceptions which a correct imagination forms of its proper objects. Virgil was more restricted than Homer, not only by his own judgment, but by the greater accuracy and correctness of his age. A great, and perhaps the greater part of Homer's fame, is owing to that fire and enthusiasm which characterize his writings; but this fire and enthusiasm is less frequently elicited in Homer by correct and accurate sentiments, than by allegorical and marvellous relations, which would pass for mere rant in the Augustan age, but for which Homer received credit, because they were warranted by the credulity and ignorance of the age in which he lived. Virgil had not, therefore, that unlimited scope, that boundless empire of imagination before him, from which Homer drew his sublimest images and his most animated descriptions. He was obliged to examine, compare, analyze, and weigh the force of all his sentiments and expressions. He knew the correct taste, discriminating judgment, and detecting acumen of his contemporaries, and he was resolved to set criticism at defiance. No wonder then, that

> —— Rules as strict his labour'd work confine,
> As if the Stagyrite o'erlook'd each line.

But Homer, regardless of consequences, happily yielded to the impetuosity and rapidity of his own genius; and though he accommodated himself to the popular opinions of his country, he neither regarded nor anticipated the metaphysical correctness of future ages. In this, however, he is excusable only because he is ignorant; but Virgil could not claim the same latitude, and could not, therefore, indulge in the same flights. If Virgil, however, had lived in the time of Homer, and Homer in the time of Virgil, I doubt whether they would not have changed their poetical characters, and that we should now look upon Virgil as the prince of poets. Pope justly observes, that imagination "is a field in which no succeeding poets could dispute with Homer; and whatever commendations have been allowed them on this head, are by no means for their invention in having enlarged his circle, but for their judgment in having contracted it. For when the mode of learning changed in following ages, and science was delivered in a plainer manner, it then became as reasonable in the more modern poets to lay it aside, as it was in Homer to make use of it." If then, according to Pope, it were reasonable in Virgil, not to indulge so much in imagination as Homer, why suppose that he did not possess it, merely because he laid it aside in obedience to the dictates of reason? I cannot, therefore, agree with

Pope, when he adds, "Perhaps it was no unhappy circumstance for Virgil, that there was not in his time that demand upon him of so great an invention as might be capable of furnishing all the allegorical parts of a poem." To conclude that a poet has not a copious and fertile imagination, because he indulges it only where reason permits him, appears to me a most illogical deduction, and an unguarded judgment of Pope; for if a writer displays his imagination whenever reason assents to the intellectual flight, the most rigid logic justifies us in concluding, that his imagination could have taken a more ample range, if reason would consent to it. We are warranted in the same conclusion by Pope himself, when he says,—

> 'Tis more to guide than spur the Muses' steed,
> Restrain his fury than provoke his speed.
> The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,
> Shews most true mettle when you check his course.

Virgil, then, though he does not rise to sublimity so frequently as Homer, has not, however, exposed himself so often to the ridicule of the critics, by giving expression to sentiments that are below the dignity of the epic muse. True taste, it is true, will attribute these sentiments to the simplicity of the age; but this has not defended them from the attacks of Zoilus among the ancients, nor

of M. Perrault among the moderns. In Virgil, however, we never meet with these sentiments. "He has none of those trifling points and puerilities," says Mr. Addison, "that are so often to be met with in Ovid, none of the epigrammatic turns of Lucan, none of those swelling sentiments, which are so frequently in Statius and Claudian, none of those mixed embellishments of Tasso. Every thing is just and natural. His sentiments shew that he had a perfect insight into human nature, and that he knew every thing that was most proper to affect it.....Homer, however, in his characters of Vulcan and Thersites, in his story of Mars and Venus, in his behaviour of Iris, and in other passages, has been observed to have lapsed into the burlesque character, and to have departed from that serious air which seems essential to the magnificence of an epic poem. I remember but one laugh in the whole Æneid, which rises in the fifth book, upon Menœtes, where he is represented as thrown overboard and drying himself upon a rock. But this piece of mirth is so well-timed, that the severest critic can have nothing to say against it; for it is in the book of games and diversions, where the reader's mind may be supposed to be sufficiently relaxed for such an entertainment." With justice then has Quintilian said, in comparing his countryman Virgil to Homer: "*Quantum eminentioribus vinci-*

mur, fortasse æqualitate pensamus; perhaps Virgil compensates for his inferiority in the higher walks of poetry, by his uniformity of excellence." I am not, however, willing to admit, that if Virgil has not so frequently risen to the true sublime, it is because he wanted that creative genius that would have opened nature to his enraptured sight; but because, as Mr. Campbell says of one of our own poets, "he has no redundant thoughts or false transports, but seems on every occasion to have weighed the impulse to which he surrendered himself. Whatever ardour or casual felicities he may have thus sacrificed, he gained a high degree of purity and self-possession." What can be more sublime than the following description, and yet what more consonant to our ideas of *solitude, silence, darkness, vacuity, immensity,* and *power?*

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbræque silentes,
Et Chaos, et Phlegethon, loca nocte silentia late!
Sit mihi fas audita loqui: sit numine vestro
Pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.
Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram,
Perque domos Ditis vacuas, et inania regna.

Ye subterraneous Gods, whose awful sway
The gliding ghosts and silent shades obey;
O Chaos, hear, and Phlegethon profound,
Whose solemn empire stretches wide around,
Give me, ye great, tremendous powers, to tell
Of scenes and wonders in the depth of hell;

Give me your mighty secrets to display,
From these black realms of darkness to the day.

PITT.

Obscure they went through dreary shades, that led
Along the waste dominions of the dead.

DRYDEN.

Alluding to this passage, Mr. Burke justly observes, that Virgil, "before he unlocks the secrets of the great deep, seems to be seized with a religious horror, and to retire astonished at the boldness of his own design." Virgil, then, did not want a conception capable of elevating him to the true sublime, but he wanted courage to give expression to any sentiment, or conception, which, though it might produce a vague and undefined enthusiasm in the minds of his readers, was not warranted by that critical and philosophical view in which he considered it himself. I am, however, aware, that I have somewhere read, and, if I recollect aright, the passage is in "The Guardian," that Virgil never rises to sublimity except in his imitations of Homer, where he is fired with the spirit of that immortal bard; but as the writer of the article has given no proof, I do not find myself called upon to contend with mere assertions. A description of the horse, in Homer, is given in No. 86 of that work, and another by Virgil, which, the writer says, is imitated from

Homer. The reader will perceive how little reason there is for calling it an imitation; but as Homer had described the horse, Virgil could not escape the charge of imitating him but by remaining silent. Admitting, however, that it is an imitation, how infinitely more sublime a picture does it give us of that noble animal, than that which is painted even by the pencil of Homer; and yet how much more faithful, animated, and correct. The following are the passages given in "The Guardian." The first is from Homer.

> Freed from his keepers, thus, with broken reins,
> The wanton courser prances o'er the plains;
> Or, in the pride of youth, o'erleaps the mounds,
> And snuffs the females in forbidden grounds;
> Or seeks his wat'ring in the well-known flood,
> To quench his thirst and cool his fiery blood:
> He swims luxuriant in the liquid main,
> And o'er his shoulders flows his waving mane;
> He neighs, he snorts, he bears his head on high,
> Before his ample chest the frothy waters fly.

If we compare this with Virgil's supposed imitation, we can scarcely trace one quality, or feature of character in which they agree, except his "snorting" in Homer, and the clouds that flow from his nostrils in Virgil; and how he could have differed more from Homer, even in this individual circumstance, it is difficult to conceive, except he

omitted this quality of the horse altogether. The description follows:—

> The fiery courser, when he hears from far
> The sprightly trumpets, and the shouts of war,
> Pricks up his ears, and trembling with delight,
> Shifts pace, and paws, and hopes the promised fight;
> On his right shoulder his thick mane reclined
> Ruffles at speed, and dances in the wind;
> His horny hoofs are jetty, black, and round,
> His chin is double; starting with a bound
> He turns the turf and shakes the solid ground;
> Fire from his eyes, clouds from his nostrils flow,
> He bears his rider headlong on his foe.

In this truly animated and sublime description there is only one circumstance, to which I have already alluded, in which Virgil can be accused of imitating Homer, and yet the writer acknowledges, that the original line in Virgil

> Collectumque premens volvit sub naribus ignem,
> And in his nostrils rolls collected fire,

"is the noblest line that ever was written without inspiration." How little credit, then, are we to attach to those supposed imitations of Homer, which the curiosity of petty geniuses imagine they discover in Virgil. The passage, however, which I have now quoted shews, that if Virgil has even imitated, it is not because he wanted that genius that would have enabled him to be original, without bending before the shrine of the prince of poets.

Innumerable passages might be quoted from Virgil, teeming with all the characters of the true sublime, in which no trace of imitation can appear. He did not, however, avoid imitating Homer whenever it served to embellish his subject: on the contrary, he was happy to travel with the Meonian bard whenever chance presented him with a favourable opportunity; but he travelled with him as an equal, not as a blind follower, or servile imitator; nor did he ever suffer the spirit of imitation to lead him into digressions like professed copyists. Virgil, and all great writers, so far from thinking incidental imitations a diminution of their literary fame, knew they had given so many proofs of originality and genius, that they could not be suspected of imitating through that poverty of intellect which imitates from necessity, and from having no resources within itself; and they had too much greatness of mind to covet that sickly fame, which seeks to be original, by deviating from nature whenever it cannot pursue her but in the company of others. True genius never blushes to receive instruction even from inferior minds: and he who is best acquainted with the limited faculties of man, and how obvious are the perceptions which sometimes escape the most vigilant mind; he who knows, as Virgil did, that *non omnia possumus omnes*, so far from having any difficulty in

availing himself of that light which has been kindled by others, will rather feel pleasure in the opportunity afforded him of acknowledging the merit of living or departed worth. When we accuse men of stealing beautiful thoughts from others, and are, at the same time, obliged to acknowledge, that they have frequently reached the true sublime, where no sign of imitation appears, we endeavour to reconcile things as inconsistent in their own nature, as light is with darkness. Unless a writer possess genius, he can never, not even in one instance, attain to the true sublime without imitation. He, then, who said,

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—
> That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name,

would have proved himself to be a writer of genius, had he never written more; because, without genius, he could never have written this much, unless he had recourse to imitation. Lord Byron seems to have been fully aware of

this truth, when he says: "had Gray written nothing but his Elegy, high as he stands, I am not sure that he would not stand higher; it is the corner-stone of his glory: without it his odes would be insufficient for his fame."* Whenever it is, therefore, once ascertained, that a writer has reached the true sublime, not only in one, but in many original passages, we cannot hesitate to pronounce him a writer of genius; and when once we acknowledge him to be such, we shew our ignorance of the true and proper nature of genius, the moment we sit down to discover what he has borrowed from other writers, if we do so to insinuate, that he has imitated or borrowed through necessity, or through that sterility of intellect which can produce nothing of its own. A writer of genius, so far from going in search of the thoughts and sentiments of others, finds nothing more difficult than to reduce the copiousness of his own to order. This difficulty is never experienced by the writer of confined parts. His conceptions are few, and therefore he arranges them with ease. He has no difficulty to perceive which should come first and which last, and only regrets that he has not a few more to dispose of. But the writer of genius, so far from experiencing any

* Letter to ..... on the Reverend W. L. Bowles' Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope.

barrenness of intellect, is obliged to omit a greater number of beautiful thoughts, and consign them, perhaps, to eternal oblivion, than the former can collect altogether, after the most painful and toilsome research. To suppose, then, that he who is allowed to possess this creative faculty, is still obliged to hunt after the thoughts and sentiments of others, when he has more of his own than he can make use of, is to acknowledge, that we neither possess genius ourselves, nor know how it operates in the minds of those on whom nature has conferred it. When writers of genius seem to imitate each other, it is only because, in the first place, similar subjects generally present themselves to penetrating and discerning minds in the same point of view: for, the more accurately we perceive all the qualities and properties of any subject, the more we agree in our ideas and sentiments regarding it; and the more correct our style is, the more apt we are to express these kindred conceptions, in the same, or synonymous terms; —and because, in the second place, a passage in another writer will sometimes present itself to a writer of genius the moment he comes to that part of his subject to which it is related; and though many other thoughts of his own may occur to him, at the same moment, it is an undoubted quality of genius, a quality peculiarly characteristic of all great minds, to prefer the beauties

of other writers to their own, and to set a value upon them, to which they do not imagine their own to be entitled.

It is, therefore, not only adhering more closely to the standard of true taste, but also more agreeable to the character of true genius, never to omit a beautiful expression, or sentiment, when no other is so peculiarly adapted to our subject, though a similar expression, or sentiment, has been already used by another writer. Words and expressions are common to all men; and those are always best which are most applicable to our subject, however frequently they may have been used before. While we do not bend our subject from its proper direction to make way for them, it is agreeable to the most correct, as well as to the most natural taste, to make use of them. Whenever, therefore, they happen to meet us in the way, let us not turn our subject aside in order to avoid them. They cannot become us worse than they became those who made use of them before. The worst, at least, that can befal us, is, that our vanity may be hurt by the reflection that we are not original; but even this loss could never be felt, if we could once become, like Swift, "too proud to be vain."

Perhaps it may be asked, what need is there of looking up to the authority of established writers, if natural genius is so copious and fertile

in discovering such ideas, and perceiving such relations and differences, as properly belong to the subject of its contemplation? To what purpose do we cultivate our powers of discerning and distinguishing, if nature has already endowed us with that clear perception that seeks not to be enlightened by the experience of others? To this I reply, that all men do not possess this natural genius that is so fertile in the discovery of relations; and that all who are writers, so far from being men of genius, are not always men of ordinary talent. I believe, then, it will at least be admitted, that those who are thus partially provided for by nature, ought to look up to the authority of those to whom she has been more prodigal of her favours; and yet I believe, that, at their commencement in the literary world, these minor geniuses stand less in need of authority, than he who possesses the mind of Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, or Newton. He whose notions are limited, and whose perceptions are few, has not his attention distracted by a host of ideas, notions, distinctions, relations, conclusions, and probabilities. He sees an object only in two, three, or perhaps four points of view, and, if he compare it with another, he can only take these four points into consideration. The light of common sense, without any authority, will enable him to dispose of these few points as he ought, and to ex-

press them with that little nicety and precision which is best adapted to them. "Men of ordinary capacity," as I have elsewhere observed,* "possess very clear and distinct ideas, while these ideas are not permitted to stray beyond certain limits. When they know their own powers, and venture not into forbidden regions of intellect, they sometimes display delicacy of taste, and correctness of judgment in the minuter departments of science. These little geniuses take a peculiar pride in their accuracy and nicety of thought, and are as neat and particular in their manners as they are exact and precise in their ideas; such is the sympathetic harmony that exists between the body and mind. They often descry inaccuracies and inelegancies that escape the more enlarged views of talent and genius, not because their perceptions are more exquisitely fine, but because they stand nearer to their object; for he who takes in a large prospect cannot wait to examine all the individual objects which it embraces, with the attention of him who confines his observation to a point. But unhappily they are short-sighted, and the moment they attempt to extend their views beyond their natural horizon, or proper limits of their sight, all the

* Essay on the Gradations of the Human Intellect, in the Numbers for March, April, May, and June, 1821, of the European Magazine.

objects of nature put off their natural colours, and appear to them in borrowed hues. They cannot, therefore, take in the vast performances of genius, nor perceive the grandeur of their design, the harmony of their parts, nor the secret links by which these parts are connected. Hence it is, that when such men have confined themselves to works which required neither expansion of thought, nor depth of observation, their talents have not been uselessly employed; and they have succeeded better in certain departments of the sciences than those who were masters of them. Those who have collected and arranged the elements of language were not those who astonished the world by their writings and their eloquence. Their art and chief merit consists in arranging and methodizing the simpler elements of science, but they must not meddle with the higher beauties of composition, lest they should confound meanness of expression with simplicity of style, or the false sublime with grandeur of sentiment; for the moment they venture beyond their depth, or pass the limits of that horizon which nature has made the boundary of their intellectual vision, they lose that clearness of perception which they naturally possess, and become bewildered in the wizard habitations of a land which was never intended for their abode."

So far then as their ideas extend, they stand

less in need of authority to regulate their taste than men of vast and comprehensive minds. Indeed, the rules of taste are not properly applicable to things trifling and unimportant in their own nature; or rather, they have a taste that peculiarly belongs to themselves; and he whose mind is formed by nature to what is low and undignified, is also endowed by nature with that sort of taste which is best suited to express them, as well in speaking as in writing. There is a peculiar cast of manner discernible in men of limited faculties: every thought of theirs stands by itself, and has no alliance with its fellow; for as they do not trace distinctions or relations, they have but few thoughts, and these are always square, and round, and fit for use. A wonderful sympathy prevails between their manners and mode of thinking: every thing is fixed, and done as it were mechanically, so that while we feel our own superiority over such people, we are pleased with that neatness, order, and *ajustement*, which characterize not only their expression, but their mode of delivery. Those who belong to this gradation of intellect, have already that taste which is best suited to the subjects which engage their attention, and they not only think it the best taste themselves, but we coincide with them. If, however, it should be thought, that though they approve of this taste, themselves, we do not ap-

prove of it also, I am willing to admit, that we should not approve of it in ourselves; but that we approve of it in them, and instinctively perceive, that it is best suited to them, is a fact confirmed by the best experience, the testimony of public feeling. As a proof of this, I will quote a circumstance in the life of William Peer, which is thus related in "The Guardian," No. 82: "Mr. William Peer, of the Theatre Royal, was an actor at the Restoration, and took his theatrical degree with Betterton, Kynaston, and Harris. Though his station was humble, he performed it well, and the common comparison between the stage and human life, which has been so often made, may well be brought out upon this occasion. It is no matter, say the moralists, whether you act a prince or a beggar,—the business is to do your part well. Mr. William Peer distinguished himself particularly in two characters, which no man ever could touch but himself. One of them, was the speaker of the prologue to the play which is contrived in the tragedy of Hamlet, to awake the consciences of the guilty princes. Mr. William Peer spoke that preface to the play with such an air, as represented that he was an actor, and with such an inferior manner, as only acting an actor, as (that he) made the others on the stage appear real great persons, and not representatives. This was a nicety in acting, that none but the most subtle

player could so much as conceive. I remember his speaking these words, in which there is no great matter but in the right adjustment of the air of the speaker, with universal applause:

> For us and for our tragedy,
> Here stooping to your clemency,
> We beg your hearing patiently.

Hamlet says, very archly, upon the pronouncing of it, *Is this a prologue, or a posy of a ring?* However, the speaking of it got Mr. Peer more reputation, than those who speak the length of a puritan's sermon every night will ever attain to. Besides this, Mr. Peer got great fame upon another *little* occasion. He played the apothecary in *Caius Marius*, as it is called by Otway, but Romeo and Juliet as originally in Shakspeare. It will be necessary to recite more out of the play than he spoke, to have a right conception of what Peer did in it. Marius, weary of life, recollects means to be rid of it, after this manner:

> I do remember an apothecary,
> That dwelt about this rendezvous of death:
> Meagre and very rueful were his looks,
> Sharp misery had worn him to the bones.

When this spectre of poverty appeared, Marius addresses him thus:

> I see thou art very poor,
> Thou mayest do any thing;—here's fifty drachmas,
> Get me a draught of what will soonest free
> A wretch from all his cares.

When the apothecary objects that it is unlawful, Marius urges,

> Art thou so base and full of wretchedness,
> Yet fear'st to die? Famine is in thy cheeks,
> Need and oppression stareth in thy eyes,
> Contempt and beggary hang on thy back;
> The world is not thy friend, nor the world's laws;
> The world affords no law to make thee rich,—
> Then be not poor, but break it and take this.

Without all this quotation, the reader could not have a just idea of the visage and manner which Peer assumed, when, in the most lamentable tone imaginable, he consents, and delivering the poison like a man reduced to the drinking it himself, if he did not vend it, says to Marius,

> My poverty, but not my will, consents.
> Take this and drink it off, the work is done.

It was an odd excellence, and a very particular circumstance, this of Peer's, that his whole action of life depended upon speaking five lines better than any man else in the world. But this eminence lying in so narrow a compass, the governors of the theatre observing his talents to lie in a certain knowledge of propriety, and his person permitting him to shine only in the two above parts, his sphere of action was enlarged by the addition of the post of "property-man."

This circumstance in the life of Peer, shews, that minds of limited capacities are those which

benefit least by the light of culture, or the guidance of authority or precept. They see but a short way, and their feelings never stray beyond the horizon of their perceptions. Their homely feelings and perceptions may, therefore, be said to be better acquainted with each other, than the more diversified feelings and perceptions of a man of genius; and this acquaintance produces so perfect a harmony, or familiarity between them that they both seem to be cast in the same mould; and we instinctively acknowledge the correctness of that taste which suits, even in little things, "the action to the word, and the word to the action." Hence it is, that men of narrow parts have always something more fixed in their character, than men of enlarged and comprehensive minds. They have a certain manner of thinking and of feeling, from which they seldom deviate; and the range of this commerce between the passive and active powers being so extremely limited, the same round of thought and feeling must frequently recur, and thus stamp a character for them, which is recognized after a very short acquaintance. The man of more enlarged, extensive, and diversified knowledge, having his mind continually engaged in some new object of contemplation or other, returns not so frequently to the same thought; and when he does, it may be suggested to him by a train of ideas

or feelings, extremely different from those in which he was, when it engaged his attention before. As, then, the same thoughts recur less frequently to men who travel through an extensive range of ideas, than to those who are limited to a few, and as the feelings which attend them are always assuming a new character, and take a part of "their form and pressure" from that state of thought and feeling which immediately preceded them, there can be little of fixed manners in the character of a great genius. His most intimate friends would, therefore, be unable to delineate them, and he would find it impossible to describe them characteristically himself, because new objects of contemplation necessarily produce new thoughts, new thoughts produce new feelings, and new feelings produce a new manner or character. Hence it is, that though he is intimately acquainted with the human heart, and the springs and motives of human actions, he would find it infinitely more difficult to paint his own character, than that of his friends. In them he finds something fixed and determined; but he finds little to grasp in his own character, at one moment, that does not elude him at the next. This is generally attributed to eccentricity of manners; but, so far as eccentricity means a deviation from natural manners, it is not true. The indefinable manners of a man of genius, are, perhaps, more natural

than the fixed and uniform manners which belong to more contracted minds. The manners of the latter are generally regulated by one uniform standard: the manners of the former, by the impulse of the moment—by the influence of feelings, eternally varying with the circumstances by which they are produced. This revolution is natural:—when causes change, the effects should change with them. But the man who is unmoved by the revolution of circumstances, whom we always find nearly in the same temper, whatever causes may occur to produce a change in it, may boast of being, what some would call a sensible man, and what others would dignify with the name of philosophy, but he can never pretend to be a man of feeling,—a man whose sensibilities respond to the slightest influence which is exercised over them. The latter is, therefore, the man whose character is most difficult to be defined; not because he is eccentric, but because every change of circumstances produces a corresponding change in his feelings, and consequently in his character.

From these observations it is evident, that men of enlarged and diversified powers, stand more in need of precedent,—of some model by which they can regulate, if not their manners, at least that endless variety of ideas and conceptions which continually crowd upon their minds, than men of limited views. He who has but few ideas,

as I have already observed, cannot find much difficulty in disposing of them to the best advantage; but he who is eternally tracing new relations and distinctions, and perceiving new qualities in objects which he never noticed before, must stand in need of some model by which they may be regulated. He wants no model, it is true, to teach him how to think, wherever unaided reason can attain to certainty; but he wants it to gain that experience which no original powers of mind can supply: he wants it to teach him how to express his thoughts, and arrange his matter, with taste and elegance; for the more numerous and diversified his thoughts are, the more does he need precedent and authority to express each of them in that manner which will be found generally pleasing. Taste is not the characteristic of genius, or of strong, mental energies: these energies are the gift of nature, and are more solicitous of discovering new ideas, and tracing new relations and differences, than of attending to the manner in which they are most happily expressed; but taste is less the gift of nature than of cultivation and experience, and is, if possible, less solicitous about the logical accuracy of our conceptions, than about manner, style, selection, arrangement, and expression. Taste will, therefore, have more difficulty in guiding him whose thoughts and conceptions are more nume-

rously diversified, than in directing the man who is limited to a few; which is saying, in other words, that the more genius we possess, the more our thoughts abound; and the more rapidly they pursue each other, the more we stand in need of precedent, model, example, or call it by what name you will, which assists to regulate and guide us through the mazes of intellectual perception.

The ancients, therefore, were not mistaken, when they laid it down as a principle, without which they wisely deemed oratorial excellence unattainable, "*quod omnibus disciplinis et artibus debet esse instructus orator,* that an orator ought to be an universal scholar, and conversant in all kinds of learning." The orator, who is supposed to speak extempore, could not otherwise, in their opinion, and experience proves that their judgment was the result of deep reflection, have immediate recourse to all those images, sentiments, acknowledged truths, and popular opinions, in the enumeration of facts and delineation of circumstances, which would at once enforce conviction, and hurry along with him in his precipitate career, the minds and feelings of his auditors; and though they were aware that a glowing and ardent imagination, revelling in the enthusiasm of its own creations, and identifying itself with all the sympathies, biasses, and propensities of kindred natures,

may, in its first career, break down the barriers which not only reason and philosophy, but the sober calculations of common sense, have opposed to the influence of seductive eloquence; they knew, at the same time, that the triumph of imagination, and the career of genius, like some grand and imposing phenomenon of nature which is looked upon without surprise the moment we become acquainted with its cause, are but of short duration; and that he who would hold a lasting empire over the human heart, must not only furnish himself with those brilliant conceptions which gain upon the affections of his auditors, but also with that copious and expansive knowledge which enables him to pursue his adversary, step by step, through all the labyrinths and involutions of argument, to detect what is specious, to disprove what is false, to analyze what is ingenious and calculated to deceive, and to present to his auditors the concurring sentiments of ages and of nations in cases of a similar nature. It is only by the united powers of eloquence and of reason, that the orator can gain the affections of the heart, and satisfy at the same time the doubts which reason, philosophy, and common sense suggest, not only at the present moment, but when cool reflection has afterwards separated the appeal to the feelings from the address to the understanding. He whose feelings are once im-

posed upon by a brilliant display of legal or senatorial eloquence, in which he cannot afterwards trace that close consecutive train of argument, which might impose not only on himself, but on the orator, will listen to him the next time with caution and distrust, however powerful may be his appeal. He then, who would secure a lasting reputation, must imbue his mind *omnibus disciplinis et artibus*. In the present age, however, we think ourselves qualified to shine in all departments of literature, before we have well finished a superficial, classical education; and to this alone we must impute the false, effeminate, and indefinable taste which particularly characterizes our school of poetry. He who serves his apprenticeship to the Muses, must not hope to be acquainted with his profession in the same term of years with him who intends to become a schoolmaster, or an accountant. He may indeed, at an early age, be fertile in his ideas, ardent in his imagination, and elevated in his conceptions, if he possess genius; but mere genius will not make him acquainted with the nature and movements of the human heart. This is the work of experience alone. No wonder then that the precocity of authorship which characterizes the present age, should produce little that is worthy of public approbation. Our poetry is, literally, prose run mad. We affect to imitate a few writers of un-

doubted genius, who, confiding in their own strength, and spurning the control of precept and authority, have, like Homer's "wanton courser, o'er-leap'd the mounds" which classical correctness and more tempered, but not less potent or less rapid energies, had prescribed to the flights of poetical genius. Ambitious of trying their strength in a new style of versification, they spurned the ancient landmarks, and expatiated at large in that intellectual career which they had chalked out for themselves. But though a writer of genius may occasionally venture into new paths, and return with safety, like a young, inexperienced, but powerful warrior, who quits his ranks, and in the strength and impetuosity of ungovernable youth, forces his way into the midst of the enemy, and returns in triumph, such an example is not to be imitated. All men are not endowed with the strength of Hercules, the rapidity of Achilles, or the magnanimity of Hector; and he whose intellectual arm has not been invigorated by nature with the energies of genius, so far from quitting his ranks, should rather lurk in the rear, and seek refuge from danger, not in his own individual might, but in the security of the station in which he has placed himself. He whose poetry is regulated by no fixed standard, requires more genius and powers of mind to confer that interest upon it which compensates for

the absence of poetic harmony, than he who renders the structure of his verses melodious and agreeable to the ear. The most fantastic versifier may procure readers for a time, but they read him through novelty and not through pleasure. The pleasures of novelty, however, are of short duration; and the work which has nothing else to recommend it is soon laid aside and forgotten. We read poetry merely for pleasure; and such is the perfect harmony that exists between the sensitive and intellectual faculties, that whatever displeases the one cannot please the other. The poetry, therefore, which is not musical to the ear cannot be rendered agreeable to the understanding by any effort of genius. The best works in our language are therefore seldom read; and neither Thomson, with all the scenery and imagery of nature, nor Milton, with all the grandeur and sublimity of the heavens, could win the soul to an approbation of their works, because they neglected to court the approbation of the ear. I am aware that Milton and Thomson are to be found in every library, and so far it might be thought that they are authors with whom we are all pleased; but as every one's own experience will enable him to determine this question, it is unnecessary to attempt proving what must ultimately be proved by feeling alone.

Mr. Alison, indeed, maintains, that metre and

rhyme, so far from being essential to poetry, are mere restraints in which "only the ignorance or necessities of a rude age have shackled it;" and Mr. Knight says, it appears to him, "that the most melodious versification affords very little, if any at all, of mere sensual gratification, the regularity of metre or rhyme being rather calculated to assist memory and facilitate utterance, than to please the ear."* I am doubtful whether other readers feel as they do; and I have some difficulty in reconciling what Mr. Knight advances here, with what he says in a subsequent part of the same work, in opposition to this very passage in Mr. Alison, and in which he quotes his words. In this passage he asserts, that "to free it (poetry) from metre and rhyme, restraints with which it has been said, '*that only the ignorance or necessities of a rude age have shackled it,*' would be in fact to deprive it of its essence."† If rhyme be *essential* to poetry, what renders it so but the "sensual gratification" which it affords the ear? It possesses no other advantage which blank verse does not equally possess, and it is to this sensual gratification we must therefore attribute the preference which we give it. *Nihil intrare,* says a celebrated critic, *potest in affectum quod in aure velut quodam vestibulo statim offendit.* ‡ If then

* Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste, p. 49, 50.
† Idem, p. 120. ‡ Quintil. Inst. L. ix.

rhyme and regular measures be essentially necessary to confer on English poetry that lasting pleasure which is equally felt in all ages; the more we deviate from regular measures, and the less frequently that charm is renewed which results from the harmony of similar sounds, the less we consult the pleasure of our readers, and, what requires no spirit of prophecy to foretell, the sooner our readers will consult their own pleasure by letting us sink into oblivion. Our modern school of poetry takes a license in the modulation of accents, the disposition of pauses, and the recurrence of rhyme, that is destructive of all harmony; so that I doubt whether the greater portion of the poetry with which we have been lately stocked, will survive the present age, pregnant as it is with false taste and unnatural associations. The spirit by which we are guided is evidently the spirit of affectation, of singularity, of aiming to produce effect by variety without uniformity, and novelty without interest. Some seek to nonplus their reader with the difficulty of comprehending their meaning, or to extort his applause by producing new thoughts, which are new, only because no good writer would suffer his mind to stray in pursuit of such intellectual vagaries.

It is certain, indeed, that a poet's extravagance, licentiousness, and contempt for rule, are gene-

rally proportioned to the might and rapidity of his genius, if he commence his poetical career before experience has taught him the value of precedent and authority; and I doubt not but men of real genius have tended more to corrupt true taste, than the veriest blockheads in society. I would not, however, insinuate that taste and genius are incompatible with each other; on the contrary, I believe that no man is so capable of an exquisite and perfect taste, as a man of genius; but though this be true, I believe, at the same time, that when genius ventures into the literary world, before reason and experience have matured its powers, it is the greatest corrupter of pure classical taste. A man of ordinary capacity can seldom do much mischief: he has neither arguments to convince, nor enthusiasm to persuade; but if a man of genius should become a writer before he has formed correct ideas of beauty, and consequently, before his taste and judgment are matured, he takes the ignorant and inexperienced by surprise; who can neither measure the extent of his powers, the force of his reasonings, the propriety of his style, nor the correctness of his sentiments. He secures, therefore, a crowd of admirers among readers and writers, and the latter consequently become blind and obsequious imitators. Whoever therefore hurries forward with a perfect contempt for petty ornaments, and

those lighter embellishments, or minuter graces, which set off the grander and more imposing characters of beauty, must unavoidably hurt the public taste. This rapid movement is, indeed, the true characteristic of genius, which frequently bears down in its precipitate career the opposing barriers of criticism and philosophy. To set the public taste at nought, to force it into a new direction, and oblige it to yield to a new impulse, is, perhaps, an infallible criterion of genius, for this revolution can never be effected by ordinary intellects. "After the praise of refining the taste of a nation," says Mr. Smith, "the highest eulogy perhaps which can be bestowed on any author, is to say that he corrupted it." I would not, however, be one of those who would check its first career; though I hold it necessary to adnish it afterwards of its irregularity; for in its most wanton flights, it frequently attains to a sublimity of conception, to which it would never have arisen if it had first secured itself from the possibility of error, by rendering its imagination subservient to the controul of taste and judgment.

It is certain, however, that though the writer of genius "loves to rush forward," as D'Alembert says, "without controul and without rule, to produce indiscriminately the monstrous and the sublime, and to carry down its rapid stream, gold and mud mingled together, by the impetuosity of its

course," it never proceeds long in this precipitate career, unless countenanced in it by the bad taste of the age, or deprived of access to models of pure and classic elegance. And while the dunce only becomes inveterately established in error, the clear perceptions of genius soon learn to reject what is redundant, to loathe what is indelicate, to detect what is gross, to contemn what is affected, and, in a word, to acquire that chaste and correct taste, which alone can give that polish to the works of genius which serves to render them immortal. *Facile est* (says Quintilian) *remedium ubertatis, sterilia nullo labore vincuntur.* One beauty, in a writer of genius, can redeem a thousand faults, as "charity covereth a multitude of sins."

To acquire, therefore, a pure and correct taste, we must be guided, not by those patterns of excellence which obtain in our own age and country, nor yet by the taste of any other particular age and country; but we must carefully select from each whatever is most excellent, that is, whatever seems to agree best with the taste of all ages and of all nations. In every age, false taste is more prevalent than the true: we are, indeed, acquainted only with the false taste of our own age; but are we thence to conclude, that the brightest eras in the history of Grecian and Roman literature have been more exempt from it than our own? How many writers were there in

the Augustan age, of whom we know nothing, merely because they were the disciples of false taste, and because their works have consequently never reached us. And how many writers are there at present, who will be consigned to oblivion before the expiration of the present century. Posterity will therefore be ignorant of the false taste that prevails at present. They will judge of us, as we judge of former ages, only by those writers who have attained to excellence; and they will conclude, that an age which produced men of such transcendent powers of mind, must be an age pre-eminently blessed with taste and genius. The taste of an age is not judged of by the many, but by the few. The Dunciad tribe will glide into oblivion, and eternal silence will shed its Lethean influence over their forgotten shades.

CHAP. V.

On the Influence of Habit, in Matters of Taste.

THE influence of what is called *habit*, but which will hereafter appear to be the effect of comparison, in determining and modifying the character of taste, is at once so powerful, and so obviously apparent, that it has created a scepticism on the subject, which has not merely extended to those who have never given themselves those habits of comparison and investigation, which enable us to discriminate the beauties of nature and of art, but has even reached to those who have made taste the subject of their most serious and critical attention. To remove this scepticism, and to prove that it has originated in a mistaken view of the true nature and principles of taste, is an undertaking of no ordinary nature. I therefore engage in it, though without any doubt on my own part, as to the fixed and immutable nature of taste, yet with some doubts of being able to convert others to the same creed, feeling, as I do, how difficult it is to remove prejudices that

seem to be founded in the very nature and constitution of man. We are told that there is nothing fixed in the laws of taste, that every thing is determined by *habit*, and that we are so much under the influence of this habit, that what serves for a model of beauty in one country, will create the most marked disgust and aversion in another. We are told that the Indians of North America make beauty consist in *a broad flat face, small eyes, high cheek-bones, three or four black lines across each cheek, a low forehead, a large broad chin, a clumsy hook-nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt*. We are told that the same people are so far from thinking the whiteness of an European skin at all conducive to beauty, that it only excites in them the disgusting idea of dead flesh, sodden in water, till all the blood and juices are extracted*. Buffon relates many opinions on this subject in his Natural History, which tend to shew that there is nothing fixed in our ideas of beauty; and the fact seems to be so well substantiated, that it sets all doubt at rest on the subject. Are we then to conclude, from the endless variety of tastes that prevail in different ages, and in different nations, that there are no fixed

* Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, &c. p. 88 and 122.

qualities in objects better calculated to affect us than others, with that pleasing emotion which results from real or imaginary beauty? Is it certain, that all the qualities of an object are equally beautiful, and that though some qualities fail of exciting this pleasing emotion in some people, they never fail of exciting it in others? These conclusions would seem obvious, from the varieties of taste that obtain in different nations; and they seem to confirm that scepticism which denies any principles to be fixed or certain in the laws of taste. There appears, therefore, to be very considerable difficulty in removing this scepticism; because it seems to be sanctioned by the most warrantable of all prejudices, the natural, unsophisticated biasses and propensities of man. Strong, however, as these objections are to the immutability of the principles of taste, they are rendered still more formidable by the views in which they have been contemplated by ingenious writers, and the arguments which they have advanced in their defence; and as I neither wish to impose upon myself, nor upon my readers, by answering only such objections to the fixed principles of taste as I choose to make myself, I will first quote the arguments that have been advanced on the sceptical side of the question, and afterwards inquire, whether they possess that evidence that must necessarily command our

assent to the theory which they attempt to establish. He who replies only to such objections against his own creed as he is able to discover himself, can seldom assure himself that the system which he adopts is not as defective as that which he endeavours to subvert, because he is never so ingenious in detecting and perceiving every principle of reasoning that stands opposed to his own theory, and supports the opposite one, as he who is already a convert to the latter. In matters of this kind, we are at once as blind and as clear-sighted as he who sees the mote in another man's eye, and cannot see the beam in his own.

I believe Mandeville, who published his "Fable of the Bees," in 1732, was the first English writer of note, who endeavoured to shew, that there were no fixed qualities belonging to beauty, nor consequently to taste, but what resulted from *habit*. Mandeville was a writer of considerable talent, but he was as loose and unfixed in his moral creed, as he was in his ideas of the principles of beauty: for he endeavours to vindicate crimes in the above work, because they serve to establish a good legislation. Many other writers, since the time of Mandeville, adopted his opinions; but in all they have written on the subject, they have added little that renders their scepticism more formidable than he had left it, till Mr. Hume

took up the subject, and after him Mr. Knight, in his "Analytical Inquiry." To Mr. Hume I have already replied: in replying to Mr. Knight I reply to Mandeville, and all the intermediate writers.

"There is scarcely any subject," says Mr. Knight, "upon which men differ more than concerning the objects of their pleasures and amusements, and this difference exists not only among individuals, but among ages and nations; almost every generation accusing that which immediately preceded it, of bad taste in building, furniture, and dress; and almost every nation having its own peculiar modes and ideas of excellence in these matters, to which it pertinaciously adheres, until one particular people has acquired such an ascendancy in power and reputation, as to set what is called the fashion; when this fashion is universally and indiscriminately adopted upon the blind principle of imitation, and without any consideration of the differences of climate, constitution, or habits of life; and every one who presumes to deviate from it, is thought *an odd mortal—a humourist*, void of all just feeling, taste, or elegance. This fashion continues in the full exercise of its tyranny, for a few years or months; when another, perhaps, still more whimsical and unmeaning, starts into being, and deposes it: all are then instantly astonished that they could ever have been pleased, even for a moment, with any thing so tasteless, barbarous,

and absurd. The revolutions in dress only, not to mention those in building, furnishing, gardening, which have taken place within the last two centuries, afford ample illustration. And it is not the least extraordinary circumstance in these revolutions, that they have been the most violent, sudden, and extravagant, in the personal decorations of that part of the species, which having most natural, has least need of artificial, charms, which is always most decorated when least adorned, and which, as it addresses its attractions to the primordial sentiments and innate affections of man, would, it might reasonably be supposed, never have attempted to increase them by distortion and disguise. Yet art has been wearied, and nature ransacked; tortures have been endured, and health sacrificed; and all to enable this lovely part of the creation to appear in shapes as remote as possible from that in which all its native loveliness consists. Only a few years ago, a beauty equipped for conquest, was a heterogeneous combination of incoherent forms, which nature could never have united in one animal, nor art blended in one composition. It consisted of a head disguised so as to resemble that of no living creature, placed upon an inverted cone, the point of which rested upon the centre of a curve of a semi-elliptic base, more than three times the diameter of its own. Yet if high-dressed

heads, tight-laced stays, and wide hoops, had not been thought really ornamental, how came they to be worn by all who could afford them. Let no one imagine that he solves the question by saying, that there have been errors in taste, as there have been in religion and philosophy; for the cases are totally different. Religion and philosophy being matters of belief, reason, and opinion, but taste being a matter of feeling, so that whatever was really and considerately *thought* to be ornamental must have been previously *felt* to be so; and though opinions may, by argument or demonstration, be proved to be wrong, how shall an individual pretend to prove the feelings of a whole age or nation wrong, when the only just criterion which he can apply to ascertain the rectitude of his own, is their congruity with those of the generality of his species.

"Is there, then, no real and permanent principle of beauty? no certain or definable combination of forms, lines, or colours, that are in themselves gratifying to the mind, or pleasing to the organs of sensation? Or are we, in this respect, merely creatures of habit and imitation, directed by every accidental impulse, and swayed by every fluctuation of caprice or fancy? It will be said, perhaps, in reply, that we must not found universal scepticism in occasional deviations, or tem-

porary irregularities, for though absurd and extravagant fashions have at intervals prevailed in all ages, and in latter times succeeded each other with little interruption, yet there are certain standards of excellence which every generation of civilized man, subsequent to their first production, has uniformly recognized in theory, how variously soever they have departed from them in practice. Such are the precious remains of Grecian sculpture, which afford standards of real beauty, grace, and elegance in the human form and the modes of adorning it, the truth and perfection of which have never been questioned, although divers other modes of producing and exhibiting those qualities have since prevailed in different ages and countries. The superiority, however, of these pure and faultless models has been invariably recognized by all, so that the vicious extravagancies and corruptions, which temporary and local fashions introduced and maintained, were tacitly and indirectly condemned even by those who most obstinately persevered in practising and encouraging them.

"But is it certain that this condemnation was sincere? and are not men's real feelings and inclinations to be judged of more by their practice than their professions? Established authority, both in literature and art, is so imposing, that few men have courage openly to revolt against

it, and renounce all allegiance, though they may tacitly secede from its controul, and let their own taste and inclination govern them entirely in their practice; and that, too, by the force of habit, in a manner and to a degree imperceptible to themselves. When we find every florid and affected rhetorician, who has successively contributed to the corruption of Greek, Latin, and English eloquence, applauding in quaint phraseology and epigrammatic point, the simple purity of Xenophon, Cæsar, and Swift, and condemning in others the very style which he employs, we can scarcely believe that he knew at the time of writing, how widely the taste which he had acquired by habit differed from the judgment which he exercised under the influence of authority. Both Michael Angelo and Bernini were enthusiastic in their admiration, or at least in their applauses, of the Grecian style of sculpture; but, nevertheless, Michael Angelo and Bernini were, in opposite ways, the great corrupters of this pure style; the one having expanded it into the monstrous and extravagant, and the other sunk it into effeminacy and affectation. The late Sir Joshua Reynolds, expressed throughout his life the most unqualified admiration for the works of Michael Angelo, while, both in his writings and conversation, he affected to undervalue those of Rembrandt, though he

never attempted to imitate the former, but formed his own style of colouring and execution entirely from the latter, for whose merits he had the justest feeling, while he had none at all for those of the other, as his own collection abundantly proved.—For the pictures which it contained of the Dutch Master were all genuine and good, while those attributed to the Florentine were spurious and below criticism. His feeling was just though his judgment was wrong; and so far he was the reverse of Michael Angelo and Bernini, whose judgment was true while their feelings were false. As the vices, however, of both these celebrated artists, were more enthusiastically admired in their respective ages, than even the merits of either Rembrandt or Reynolds were, it may reasonably be doubted whether they dictated to, or complied with, the taste of their contemporaries. Either supposition equally favours the sceptical side of the question, concerning any real and permanent principles of taste."*

I have given this passage at full length lest I should render Mr. Knight's arguments less clear, forcible, or conclusive, than they would seem, if I had quoted it in parts, and answered each part separately. His first argument against any fixed principles of taste, is drawn from the

* Analytical Inquiry, p. 1—7.

revolution that takes place in dress and fashion. Before I shew how little such an argument can weigh against the immutable laws of taste, I must previously observe, that if Mr. Knight has succeeded in proving that there are no fixed principles of taste, it follows that there is no such thing as taste or beauty at all—a conclusion which I believe Mr. Knight is not prepared to allow, as he himself, throughout his "Analytical Inquiry" frequently defends the beauty of many passages in writing, and condemns others, and even endeavours to explain to us in what beauty consists—an explanation which is truly absurd, if there be no principles to guide us in our judgment of it. He who proves that there are no qualities in things better calculated to please us than others, by any intrinsic property of their own, that the qualities which please A will not please B, and that the qualities which do not please A will please B, necessarily proves either that there is no such thing as beauty at all, or, otherwise, that every thing is beautiful; and in either case, there can be no such thing as taste. For, in the first place, though the quality which pleases A will not please B, it is not, on that account, to be deemed less beautiful than the quality which does please him, because the power of the latter quality equally fails in pleasing A. All qualities then please in their turn, and therefore

they all stand on the same level; whence it follows, that all the qualities of objects are beautiful, or that they are all devoid of it; as no argument can be advanced for or against certain qualities, but what is equally conclusive for or against all other qualities. Supposing then, that, according to this theory, all qualities are beautiful, there can be no such discriminating faculty as taste; for it requires no taste, no discrimination to perceive what is beautiful, when every quality we can possibly contemplate is admitted to be so. If the least discrimination, the least taste, the least exercise of judgment were necessary to perceive what is beautiful, it must necessarily follow, that there is something not beautiful. The moment we distinguish or discriminate, we admit the things which we distinguish not to be the same with the things from which they are distinguished. But as Mr. Knight's theory renders all qualities equally beautiful, as they all please and displease in their turn, some pleasing the natives of one country, and some those of another, it is impossible to have recourse to any species of distinction at all, unless we distinguish beauty from itself. There can, therefore, be no taste, as there is no opportunity left for discrimination. To make any pretensions to it, in this case, would be absurd; for though a man may affect to display his taste by separating such qualities as

please himself from those which do not please him, yet, as the qualities which he rejects are as beautiful as those which give him pleasure, and as another person, who would exercise the same power of selecting and rejecting that he does, would select the very qualities which he has rejected, and reject those which he had selected—all this pretended selection and rejection, and all this pretension to taste would amount to nothing in the end, because it would either prove that all objects are beautiful, or that beauty has no existence. The latter consequence, indeed, follows as naturally from Mr. Knight's theory as the former; for as there is no quality but what displeases some while it pleases others, it may as well be concluded, that all qualities are destitute of beauty, as that they all possess it. Such absurd and opposite conclusions can always be drawn from false theories; and though we should have no means left of proving a true theory, or system, to be true, by direct arguments, yet we are often able to prove all opposite theories to be false; and a direct proof that all contrary systems are erroneous is always admitted as an indirect proof of the truth of that system to which they are opposed. If, then, there be no fixed principles of taste, there are no fixed qualities in objects fitted to give universal pleasure; and when any individual talks of beauty, he does not

mean, or at least he should not mean, what stands opposed to ugliness, but what is opposed to those particular qualities which appear displeasing to himself; these qualities being as beautiful in the sight of others as they are ugly in his estimation of them. If, then, Mr. Knight has succeeded in proving, that there are no fixed principles of taste, from the diversity of sentiments and ideas of beauty that prevail in different countries, he has evidently proved either that all objects are beautiful, or that beauty has no existence; and in either case, that there is no such faculty, or discriminating power, as taste; for if all objects be ugly, or if they be all beautiful, there is no opportunity left for discrimination. Let us now see how far his arguments are conclusive on the subject.

He first denies that there can be any fixed principles in taste, because the fashions in dress, building, &c. never remain stationary. But before he concluded, from the changes that are eternally taking place in dress, &c. that there are no fixed principles by which we can be guided in these matters, he should have shewn, that every change which takes place is considered by the public to be more beautiful than that which it has exploded; and that it is, in consequence of its greater beauty, that they have determined to adopt it. This he has neither proved, nor even

attempted to prove; and it has been strangely overlooked by all writers on the subject. We know well, that the common feeling of mankind is never consulted on those occasions: on the contrary, we must have little acquaintance with the world not to know, that those who introduce the fashions are not the public at large, but a few individuals, whose taste is guided by no principle whatever but that of distinguishing themselves in their airs, their manners, their dress, their furniture, their equipages, their houses, their gardens, &c. &c. from the rest of mankind. To what purpose, they argue, do we possess wealth and affluence, if we pass through life without any mark to distinguish us from our inferiors? How are we to exact from them that submission which is due to our rank, if they appear in the same badges of external distinction with us? Hence it is, that so long as pride and the love of distinction continue to influence the councils of man, and those internal movements of the heart that prompt him to action, it is idle to hope, that society will ever remain fixed in the articles of dress, furnishing, &c.; and the revolutions of fashion will always keep pace with the progress of wealth and power. Public virtue, or public distress, alone can render a nation observant of neatness and propriety in those arts that tend to embellish and adorn life. The fashions in England, about a cen-

tury ago, remained stationary about twelve years, as Mandeville himself testifies, from whom, probably, Mr. Knight has borrowed this argument against any fixed principles in taste. "How mean and comically," observes that writer, "a man looks, that is otherwise well-dressed, in a narrow-brimmed hat, when every one wears broad ones. And again, how monstrous is a great hat when the other extreme has been in fashion for a considerable time. Experience has taught us, that these modes seldom last above ten or twelve years, and a man of three-score must have observed five or six revolutions of them at least. Yet the beginnings of these changes, though we have seen several, seem always uncouth and are offensive afresh whenever they return." These modes, which lasted ten or twelve years, in the time of Mandeville, seldom continue as many months, at present; not, I believe, because the English possessed more public virtue at that period of our history than they do now, but because an increase of national wealth enables those who stand at the head of society, and who influence it by their example, to alter the present fashion the moment they find it adopted by the lower orders of society, who, with equal pride, but with less means of gratifying it, slowly follow their example. I doubt, however, whether the higher classes

would throw aside the fashion *a-la-mode* so quickly, if the lower classes had never the vanity of imitating them. All they seek, by adopting new fashions, is to distinguish themselves from the latter; but the moment they find all distinction lost by the universal adoption of the fashion which they last introduced, they are necessarily obliged to adopt another, or yield that superiority over them which they imagine they derive from external appearance. It is certain, at the same time, that in introducing a new mode they do not always consult the public feeling, or consider what fashion a correct and elegant taste would naturally dictate. Are we, then, to conclude, that the public have no taste? that they are incapable of discriminating what is truly beautiful from what is otherwise; because a few individuals introduce such modes and fashions into the world as their own caprice, or humour, happens to dictate? But, it will be asked, why do mankind adopt such fashions as these few introduce, if they do not approve of them, or consider them beautiful? To this I reply, that whoever thinks man a creature governed by only one uniform influence, whether this be the influence of beauty, ambition, fame, or any other influence whatever, is greatly mistaken. Though we prefer what is beautiful to its contrary, we only

do so when no other principle of our nature exerts its influence over us. If there be nothing in objects to determine our choice but their mere beauty or ugliness, we naturally and instantaneously prefer the former, and reject the latter; but it must be remembered, that the influence of mere beauty, except when contemplated in the fair sex, is of a mild and serene character, and never of that ardent and stimulating nature, which prompts us to prefer it to all other gratifications. "Human nature," as Lord Kaimes justly observes, "is a complicated machine, and is unavoidably so, in order to answer its various purposes. The public, indeed, have been entertained with many systems of human nature, that flatter the mind by their simplicity. According to some writers, man is entirely a selfish being; according to others, universal benevolence is his duty. One founds morality upon sympathy solely, and one upon utility; but the variety of nature is not so easily reached." These sentiments of Lord Kaimes ought to be kept steadily in view by all writers, and all observers of human actions. No observation, perhaps, would be of more general utility to the scholar, the philosopher, the poet, the historian, the dramatic writer, and indeed to every author whose subject is either immediately or remotely connected with the motives and impulses by which human actions are governed. Man is

truly, as this judicious writer observes, "a complicated machine;" and whoever, in discovering certain laws of his nature, imagines that these laws always determine and regulate such of his actions as seem to be placed under their immediate influence, will always travel in darkness and obscurity, in his researches into the history of man, and in his views and delineations of human character. Though it must, then, be admitted, that beauty is more agreeable to man than deformity, there is still no certainty that he will acknowledge this preference, if any other principle of his nature prompts him to deny it. Now, in matters of dress, building, furnishing, &c. it is certain, that the laws by which beauty affects us, have little influence over us. We never ask, what fashion is most beautiful, but what fashion is adopted by the higher circles. And whether this be beautiful or not, we adopt it without hesitation. Mr. Knight's error, therefore, lies in supposing, that we adopt the reigning fashion because we think it more beautiful than that which we have relinquished; whereas the idea of beauty never enters our head. Our guiding principle in this case is, that "it is better to be out of the world than out of the fashion." It is idle, then, to argue, that we have no fixed principles of beauty, because we adopt so many different fashions; for in adopting them, we never regard whether they

are beautiful or otherwise: we adopt them because we are governed by a principle that has a much stronger influence over us, than that of beauty; namely, the pride of being esteemed of equal rank with those by whom the fashion is first introduced. If Mr. Knight could shew, that we have no interest whatever in adopting the fashion of the day, or that we are prompted to it by no impulse, but that of imagining that it is more beautiful than that which it has exploded, he might then consistently argue, that we have no fixed principles of taste; but so far from being able to prove this, it is certain, that we never adopt the fashion *a-la-mode* from any consideration of the kind: on the contrary, Mandeville himself acknowledges, and I believe every one's experience will inform him, that "*the beginning of these changes seem always (frequently*, perhaps, would be more correct) *uncouth, and are offensive afresh when they return.*" Could Mandeville have advanced a stronger argument to prove, that revolutions in dress do not emanate from any mistaken notions of beauty, but from a servile compliance with the fashion adopted by those who stand above us in society? for, so far from imitating them because we imagine they have introduced a more beautiful fashion than that which they have laid aside, he acknowledges that new fashions appear uncouth at first. It is obvious, then, that the

many are not determined, in adopting the fashions of the few, by notions of improved beauty: so that our ideas of this internal sense must never be thought versatile and inconstant, because we are ourselves versatile and inconstant in dress, furnishing, and other arts, that would seem to be under its immediate influence.

It is certain, that the fashions introduced at one time are much more, or much less, beautiful than those which either preceded or followed them; but do we ever find any difficulty in pronouncing them so? Is there any thing more common than to hear men admiring a new fashion when it is really beautiful, and condemning it when it is otherwise? Their condemnation, it is true, does not prevent them from adopting it, for the reasons which I have already assigned; but, in this adoption, their ideas of beauty remain as fixed and permanent as if they did not adopt it at all: for they recognize the fashion to be beautiful when it really is so, and condemn it when it is otherwise. I believe few will deny, that a fine, smooth, and polished cane is more beautiful than a piece of crooked ash or hazel, and yet canes have been given over to servants, because fops found they could not have the exclusive use of them to themselves. If canes came now into fashion, they would meet the same fate; for in the course of six months every thin-robed aspirer to distinc-

tion would have a silver-mounted cane, as well as my lord and duke. The consequence would be, that a cane would no longer serve to distinguish a nobleman from the veriest fribble, and he would accordingly throw it to his servant, to raise him to an equality with the tribe of petty imitators. But it matters little what he substitutes for the cane, be it ash or hazel, for the little gentry would throw aside their canes as soon as they discovered that he had abandoned his, and would, like him, substitute ash or hazel in its stead; so that canes would revert once more to servants, and become their peculiar badge of distinction.

Can any thing, then, be more evident, than that it is the love of distinction alone that gives birth to so many revolutions in fashion? For surely no one will suppose, that he who carries a hazel or ash stick in preference to a cane, does so because he thinks it more beautiful. He does so merely to distinguish himself from servants, on the one hand, and to connect himself with the nobility and higher classes, on the other. Canes were first used by the higher ranks; but the lower classes came boldly forward, and obliged them to deliver them up, simply by wearing canes themselves. The former, however, avenged themselves of the insult; for by throwing their canes to their servants, they obliged the

latter to deliver up their canes also. The servants were obviously the only gainers in the strife.

I believe, then, it must be granted, at least, that the revolutions in dress, equipages, &c. do not originate from corresponding revolutions in our ideas of beauty. Let us see, then, if we can explain, why we become reconciled to a fashion, that appeared at first disagreeable and uncouth; for this appears an insurmountable difficulty to Mr. Knight and Mandeville. Even Sir Joshua Reynolds and Pere Buffier, an able, discriminating metaphysician, have been so nonplused by it, that they have maintained that beauty produces all its effects by the power of habit alone.

In the former part of this work, I have endeavoured to shew, that he who trusts to his feelings alone, in his determinations of beauty, is liable to be mistaken, particularly so far as regards the *degree* of beauty. The first time we see a foreign animal, our feelings immediately enable us to pronounce it beautiful or otherwise; but with regard to its degree of beauty, when compared with other animals of the same species, we are totally ignorant. Our first judgment is founded on our primordial senses; but when we would pronounce any animal beautiful in its species, we must *compare* it with many others of its kind. The result of this comparison may be, that we

pronounce the animal ugly, with regard to its own species, though we pronounced it beautiful before we ever saw any other of the kind. All our correct notions of the beauty of any animal result, therefore, from comparison, and not from the primordial sense of beauty; but though this comparison determines us to pronounce the animal ugly, it may still be beautiful when compared to animals of a different kind, and we should never call it otherwise than beautiful had we never seen another of its own species. He who never saw but one zebra would instantly pronounce it a beautiful creature, though it were even the ugliest of its species; but the moment he saw a beautiful zebra placed near it, he would change his opinion, and apply the term beautiful only to the latter. If we are attentive to this law of beauty we shall have little difficulty in explaining why we become reconciled to fashions after they are a short time in use, though not before. When a fashion is first introduced, we have an opportunity of comparing it with that which is going to be displaced; and accordingly if it be not so beautiful, we must instantaneously perceive it; but if we had no antecedent sense of beauty, it is obvious we could not determine between them. When this fashion, however, continues for some time in use, and the other is entirely laid aside, we have no longer an

opportunity of entering into comparisons, and our judgment of the present mode is determined by the same law that regulated the judgment of him, who pronounced the first zebra he saw a beautiful creature, but changed his opinion the moment a more beautiful one was produced; so that though the new fashion, when first introduced, did not appear beautiful, because we had then an opportunity of comparing it with a fashion more beautiful than itself, it now appears if not beautiful, at least more so than it did at first, as our judgment of it is deduced not from comparison, but from our primordial sense of beauty. It is not habit, therefore, that reconciles us to the present fashion, but the absence of comparison: for a fashion might have been beautiful which displeased us at first, though we were prevented from thinking so, because we perceived, by comparison, that the one to which we compared it was still more beautiful. He who pronounced the zebra beautiful before he saw its fellow, did not alter his opinion through habit, but through comparison; and if he had never seen the other zebra, he would have still remained of the same opinion. His continuing to think it beautiful could not arise from habit, because he thought it so the moment he first looked upon it; and if it were not beautiful, he would never have thought it so, at any time. But have we ever heard of an animal that appeared

ugly at first, such as the Guana of South America, or the Surinam toad, becoming afterwards beautiful by habit? If all fashions then were not beautiful, though not equally so, we should never recognize them as such. The principles of beauty are never entirely neglected in the most "uncouth" fashion which is obtruded upon society; and it must not be forgotten that beauty is not confined to one certain form; for though there are some forms in which she never presents herself, yet the number of forms in which she might present herself, consistent with her character, are innumerable. If, then, we become reconciled to a fashion which appeared devoid of beauty at first, we must not conclude that it was really devoid of it, but rather that it was not so beautiful as that which preceded it, and with which we compared it at the time; for, if the preceding fashion were really less beautiful, we should, so far from condemning the new fashion, acknowledge, at once, its superiority over the old. Whenever, therefore, we alter our opinions with regard to the beauty of any object, it will always be found, that this change originates from viewing it at one time without comparing it to any other object of its own kind, and from judging of it at another time by comparison. Habit is so far from being necessary, that we should alter our opinion of the beauty of any object instantaneously, if another

object, more or less beautiful, were placed near it: But prior to all comparison—if an object pleases us, it must be beautiful, though not so much so, perhaps, as another object of the same nature. It is, however, a great mistake to suppose, that any thing is not beautiful that is less so than another; for this would be to suppose, that there are no degrees in beauty. It does not, therefore, follow that a fashion is not beautiful, though it does not please us at first, merely because we compare it to a still more beautiful fashion; for before it be concluded, that we have no fixed principles of taste in judging of fashions, it must be shewn, not that we condemn a fashion when it is first introduced, and approve of it afterwards, but it must be shewn, that it is not beautiful at all, nor qualified to please, independent of any comparison with all former or subsequent fashions. For, if it be beautiful in itself, though not superlatively so, we begin to feel and acknowledge this beauty when we cease to compare it with models still more beautiful than itself. This does not result from the force of habit, but from its possessing real intrinsic beauties, which our internal sense recognizes the moment it is freed from the influence of greater and more impressive beauties, in objects of the same kind.

Mr. Knight, after surveying the revolutions of

dress, &c. asks, "are there then no real and permanent principles of beauty, no certain or definable combinations of forms, lines, or colours, that are in themselves gratifying to the mind, or pleasing to the organs of sensation?" And after putting a few more interrogations, and refuting a few anticipated objections to the sceptical side of the question, as may be seen in the former quotation, concludes by giving up all permanent principles of beauty. But it is not necessary to come to any conclusion on the subject, or, at least, to enter into any investigation of these questions, in order to discover, that Mr. Knight would never have proposed them, if he had had a clear idea of what is meant by the term beauty. When he asks, "are there no certain or definable combinations of forms, lines, &c. that are in themselves gratifying to the mind?" I reply, there are not; but I deny the conclusion which he wishes to deduce from this admission, namely, that there are no principles to distinguish beauty from deformity. The forms of beauty, if not infinite, are at least innumerable; but, innumerable as they are, they are all connected by one principle, devoid of which no object can be pronounced beautiful. This principle has escaped the acumen of Mr. Knight and all his predecessors on the subject of beauty; and Mr. Dugald Stewart, in his "Essay on Beauty," pronounces it a problem that admits of no solution.

As an inquiry into this principle will form the subject of a separate work, I will not enter into it at present; but merely observe, that though the combinations of forms in which beauty is found, are innumerable, we are not thence to conclude that they are governed by no common principle whatever, unless we can first produce two combinations of forms, acknowledged to be beautiful, and demonstrate, that all the qualities by which we are affected in the one, are different from all the qualities by which we are affected in the other. He who does this, must also demonstrate, that he is acquainted with all the qualities by which we are affected in each, for otherwise he can have no certainty but that the quality which is the cause of beauty may still remain; and consequently he can have no certainty, that he speaks the truth when he denies the existence of any common quality, because he has proved nothing from which he could deduce such a conclusion. There are different kinds of bitter, but who would argue from this variety that bitter has nothing fixed in its nature? whoever would prove this, would also prove that bitter is sweet, and sweet is bitter, by an argument sufficiently obvious to the reader. When I say that beauty is not confined to "certain combinations of forms." I use the word "certain" in Mr. Knight's sense of the expression; but, as the epi-

thet is ambiguously applied by him, I mean to say, that beauty is not confined to one certain form, nor to twenty, nor to a hundred, nor yet to a million; but, though I admit that the forms of beauty are innumerable, I deny that they are infinite, or, in other words, that every form is beautiful; and, therefore, philosophically speaking, beauty is confined to certain combinations of forms; for if it were not, ugly forms would be beautiful. I also deny Mr. Knight's sceptical conclusion, that because beauty is not confined to one certain form or to a hundred, there are no certain qualities at all that go to the composition of beauty, and that it is therefore arbitrary. The earth is not confined to ten miles in circumference, nor to a thousand, but it would be as fair to argue, that the circumference of the earth is not limited to any certain number of miles, because it exceeds a thousand, as that beauty is not limited to any certain qualities, because it is not confined to a few. If we should suppose twelve forms or figures so contrived that they would present a beautiful appearance in whatever manner they were placed with regard to each other, the number of beautiful appearances, presented by these twelve figures, would amount to the immense number of 479,001,600 no two of which would be alike. How unphilosophic is it then to conclude, that beauty is arbitrary, and found in all forms, because it is not

confined to a few. The conclusion is just the same as to assert, that these twelve figures would present an infinite number of beautiful forms because they were found to exceed some hundred millions. Had a person who made an experiment with these figures, and who continued altering their position till he placed them in 300,000,000 different situations, desisted when he came to this number, he might perhaps conclude, if he were unable to enumerate the number of possible changes, that he might continue changing them to eternity; and in coming to this conclusion he and Mr. Knight would reason just alike; but it is certain that, notwithstanding the immense number of different appearances which these twelve figures could produce, human ingenuity could not add *one* appearance more to the number. It is therefore possible for the varieties in dress to continue changing for some thousand ages, and yet remain always beautiful. But notwithstanding this, the number of beautiful forms of which dress is capable must not be deemed infinite: no arguments therefore can be drawn against fixed notions of beauty from the revolutions in dress, as the varieties produced by these revolutions bear no comparison to all the varieties of which beauty will admit. It may also be added, that the varieties in dress are not so numerous as appearances would make them, for old fashions are frequently revived, and perhaps we might go so far as to assert, that we have

scarcely any new fashions at all, as the greater part of them, if not the whole, were in use before. But even if any argument could be deduced from the varieties of fashion, it is certain that this would not prove our notions of beauty to be completely arbitrary, for the reasons which I have formerly advanced;—reasonswhich also prove that Mr. Knight is not philosophically correct when he says "that men's real feelings and inclinations are to be judged of more by their practice, than their professions." All men profess that virtue is preferable to vice, and their esteeming and honouring it more is a proof that they *feel* what they profess: yet all men do not practise that virtue which they honour and esteem. Hence it follows, that though an individual is to be judged of by his practice, and not by his professions, the public are always to be judged of by their professions, and not by their practice; and even individuals themselves are frequently wronged, when their character is viewed through the medium of their actions, and not through their professions. Many are obliged to act contrary to their feelings, and many an indignant mind scorns to justify its apparent faults, because experience has taught it to trust but little to the sympathies of mankind, and this knowledge of their insensibility creates a contempt for their approbation: the stubborn pride of conscious rectitude, serves, therefore, only to increase that suspicion which it ought to remove.

I come now to that part of Mr. Knight's sceptical view of taste in which he introduces the celebrated masters of painting, in order to shew, from their different styles, that their ideas of beauty, and consequently their tastes, were completely at variance with each other. Both Michel Angelo and Bernini, he says, "were enthusiastic in their admiration, or at least in their applauses, of the Grecian style of sculpture; but nevertheless Michel Angelo and Bernini were, in opposite ways, the great corrupters of this style, the one having expanded it into the monstrous and extravagant; and the other sunk it into effeminacy and affectation." From this argument he wishes to infer, that Michel Angelo and Bernini, notwithstanding their pretended admiration of the Grecian style of sculpture, had, at the same time, very different ideas of taste and beauty from those very sculptors whom they professed to admire. To render this more evident he adds, that "the late Sir Joshua Reynolds expressed throughout his life the most unqualified approbation of the works of Michel Angelo, while both in his writings and conversation he affected to undervalue those of Rembrandt, though he never attempted to imitate the former, but formed his own style of colouring and execution entirely from the latter, for whose merits he had the justest feeling, while he had none at all for those of the other, as his own collection

abundantly proved; for the pictures which it contained of the Dutch master, were all genuine and good, while those attributed to the Florentine, were spurious and below criticism."

It would, perhaps, be sufficient to set this argument at rest, to observe, that Reynolds declined imitating Angelo, not because his feelings inclined him more to the style of Rembrandt, but because he found it dangerous to attempt the grand and sublime manner of the illustrious Italian. No person supposes, that Reynolds possessed the daring and lofty conceptions of Angelo; and to what purpose would he adopt a style in which he had not genius to excel, however highly he admired and esteemed it? But, though he did not possess that grasp of mind, which could impress on the obedient canvass, the inexpressible *fierté*, and terrible sublime of Angelo; he possessed, in a very high degree, that judgment which points out to a watchful and discerning mind, the particular line in which it is formed to excel. He knew with Boileau, that,

> ——Souvent un esprit qui se flatte et qui s'aime
> Méconnoit son génie, et s'ignore soi-même :—

and therefore, however much he might be attached by his feelings to the grand style of Angelo, his judgment repressed that vanity which inclined him to adopt it as a model.

But Mr. Knight may probably reply, that this argument supposes, what I have no authority for supposing, namely, that Reynolds' feelings inclined him to adopt the style of Angelo, though his judgment repressed their influence; but he must recollect, that if I am not warranted in making this supposition, neither is he in assuming the contrary. I care not, therefore, if he should prove my reply to be inconclusive; because the argument that proves it so, will equally prove that the argument to which it replies, is inconclusive in itself, being founded on a similar assumption, namely, that Reynolds' feelings sympathized more with the manner of Rembrandt than with that of Angelo. If, then, I am not permitted to assume, neither is he: and if an assumption renders a reply inconclusive, so does it the position which it attempts to disprove. In this case, both the position and the reply fall to the ground, and nothing is proved on either side. This, however, is all I wish for: if his argument prove nothing, it requires no reply; and it matters little, therefore, whether my reply be conclusive or otherwise. He may, indeed, maintain that the circumstance of Reynolds' copying after the style of Rembrandt justifies him in supposing, that his feelings inclined him to it; but I may also contend, with equal appearance of reason, that his feelings led him to prefer the

style of Angelo, because he himself always declared, publicly and privately, both in conversation and in writing, that he admired the works of Angelo, and undervalued those of Rembrandt. Can I produce better authority for my assumption than this? If, however, Mr. Knight objects to it, I have no difficulty in giving it up, provided he permit that I object to his assumption in my turn; and that he abandon, accordingly, the sceptical conclusion which he has deduced from it.

But granting that all Mr. Knight has stated be true, what does it ultimately prove? Wherein does it weaken the doctrine, that our ideas of beauty are by no means arbitrary; and that there is a standard of taste in the common feeling of mankind? To what purpose are we told that Angelo and Bernini have differed so much from the style of the ancient Greek sculptors, though they professed to admire them, and that Sir Joshua Reynolds differed from Angelo, though he professed a similar admiration for his works? It was not necessary to quote any examples to convince us, that different painters, sculptors, and poets, differ very considerably in their style and manner. This is a truth with which we are too familiar; but does it follow that when men differ in their style, they must also differ in their ideas or perceptions of beauty? The conclusion

has so little philosophy in it, that the slightest exercise of reason must detect the illusion. No person doubts that the author of the "Tale of a Tub" had a very different genius from the author of "Paradise Lost;" and Mr. Knight may, if he pleases, call this difference in their genius a difference of taste; but if he does so, he will find himself greatly mistaken; for if the Venus de Medicis, or the Apollo of Belvidere, were both presented to Milton and Swift, they would unhesitatingly agree, in pronouncing it beautiful. The genius of Pope differed materially from the genius of Sir Joshua Reynolds; and Haydn's genius was different from both. But does any person suppose this diversity of genius caused any diversity in their taste, if taste be considered, as it ought to be, a power of discriminating the beauties of nature and of art? That Pope had no genius for painting, is proved by the circumstance of his having received lessons in it to no effect; but who would argue from this, that Pope differed in his ideas of beauty from Sir Joshua Reynolds, or that he would call that a daub, which Sir Joshua would pronounce a beautiful painting? No doubt, he might differ with him on some points, which were either doubtful in their nature, or concerning which no appeal had as yet been made to public feeling; but on these points, the greatest masters of painting are

not always agreed. I believe, whoever has read Dr. Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric will agree that he had a very different genius from the author of Hudibras. But does it follow that Dr. Blair had different ideas of true humour from Butler; or that he would not allow a passage to possess any beauty which Butler imagined he had done in his best manner? We all differ, then, in our peculiar or characteristic talents, but this produces no diversity in our ideas of beauty, and he who has not the least genius for music, will, notwithstanding, feel displeased, if he hear a succession of discordant notes played on a violin, and express his satisfaction, the moment he hears a lively air played with taste and feeling.

Granting, then, that Sir Joshua Reynolds' style of painting was different from that of Michel Angelo, and agreed with that of Rembrandt; granting that he wanted that nerve, which could conceive and delineate the bolder features of nature, and the sublimer affections of mind,—by what species of induction are we to conclude, that the image which appeared beautiful and sublime to Angelo, would not appear equally beautiful and sublime to him, when once presented to him, though it might never have presented itself to his mind, if Angelo had not first embodied it in the light drapery of shade and colour? The argument that would prove it,

would also demonstrate, that Dr. Blair was no judge of Hudibrastic verse, because his style of writing was so remarkably different;—it would prove, that Butler had very different ideas of sublime images, and beautiful sentiments, from Milton, because he did not write in heroic verse; —in a word, it would prove, that Addison, and all succeeding critics, who have pretended to point out the sublime passages in Homer and Milton, had very different ideas of sublime writing from these celebrated poets, because their own style and manner was so extremely different. There are, then, different styles of poetry and of painting, each of which may have excellences peculiar to itself; and though an artist seldom excels in two different styles, yet those whose styles are most widely removed from each other, have no difference of opinion with regard to the peculiar beauties of each. Had the author of Hudibras read the following passage, in which the influence of love is so finely painted, and so exquisitely imagined, who can doubt but he would recognize its beauty, though he would himself make love, speak a very different language, and in a very different style and manner?

In those deep solitudes and awful cells,
Where heavenly, pensive Contemplation dwells,
And ever musing Melancholy reigns,
What mean these tumults in a vestal's veins?

Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?
Why feels my heart its long forgotten heat?
I love, I love; from Abelard it came,
And Eloisa still must kiss the name!

Here the slow motion of long, heavy syllables admirably correspond to the pensive, love-sick melancholy, which they describe; and they are the very opposite of the style and manner in which Butler himself would describe the same passion. Take the following as a specimen:—

Quoth he, my faith as adamantine
As chains of destiny I'll maintain;
True as Apollo ever spoke,
Or oracle from heart of oak;
And, if you give my flame but vent,
Now in close huggermugger pent,
And shine upon me but benignly,
With that one, and that other pigsneye,
The sun and day shall sooner part,
Than love or you shake off my heart;
The sun, that shall no more dispense
His own, but your bright influence:
I'll carve your name on barks of trees,
With true-love knots, and flourishes;
That shall infuse eternal spring,
And everlasting flourishing:
Drink every letter on't in stum,
And make it brisk champaign become.
Where'er you tread, your foot shall set
The primrose and the violet;
All spices, perfumes, and sweet powders,
Shall borrow from your breath their odours;

Nature her charter shall renew,
And take all lives of things from you;
The world depend upon your eye,
And when you frown upon it die.

Part 2. Canto 1.

The beauty of this passage, as it is obvious to all readers, must have been equally so to Pope, as the beauty of the passage from Pope would have been to Butler. Two poets, then, may perfectly agree in their ideas of beauties, who adopt styles directly opposed to each other; so that the greatest diversity of styles will not cause the smallest diversity in the ideas of beauty which are formed by those who adopt them. Mr. Knight, then, very injudiciously concludes, that Angelo, Bernini, Rembrandt, and Reynolds, must have differed in their notions of beauty, because they differed in their style and manner of painting; not only because a difference of style does not imply a corresponding difference in our conceptions of beautiful forms, but because he concludes it in direct opposition to their own testimony, as they professed to admire the works of those very artists whose style they did not attempt to imitate;—Angelo and Bernini admiring the style of the ancient Greek sculptors, though they differed not only from them, but from each other, in the adoption of styles peculiar to the particular genius of each; and Reynolds equally en-

thusiastic in the praise of Angelo, though he carefully kept aloof from imitating a style in which his genius did not qualify him to excel. His admiration, then, of the works of Angelo is a proof, that he agreed with him in his ideas of beauty, while his adopting a different style from him, only proves that the geniuses of the two painters were completely different.

This reasoning applies to the different styles of different actors. One excels in the tragic alone, and another in the comic; but this causes no confusion in their ideas of propriety and beauty in each. The tragic actor perceives when the comedian performs his part well, though he cannot perform it himself; and the comedian has the same ideas of propriety in tragic acting, though he cannot attempt it. But even in tragic acting alone, there may be different styles, and all equally excellent; for as men differ in their manner of expressing real and unaffected grief, and as this expression must always be natural when it is real and unaffected, it is obvious that different tragic actors may adopt very different styles of acting, and yet be equally true to nature. The great error that pervades Mr. Knight's theory of taste, is, that he seeks for one invariable style as a standard of beauty, and finding that no such invariable, immutable style can be found, he concludes that beauty has a mere ideal existence,

and rests on no fixed principles founded in the nature of man. If Mr. Knight attended to the monstrous consequences that would arise from the universal adoption of one invariable style in dress, painting, poetry, oratory, the drama, &c. he would soon resign his invariable standard. Such a standard would oblige Butler to write his "Hudibras" in the heroic verse of Milton, or otherwise, Milton should write his "Paradise Lost" in the burlesque style of Hudibras. Let us take any other style we please as a standard, the result will be the same: a result which Mr. Knight had evidently too much taste to approve of, had he only attended to the consequences that would emanate from identifying fixed notions of beauty with fixed and invariable models, or styles, in painting, poetry, or any of the fine arts. The best style is that which is most suitable to the subject; but as subjects are eternally changing, as the same subjects are viewed in very different lights by different writers, and as different minds receive different impressions from the same view, it follows, that to convey these impressions exactly as they are felt, to treat different subjects in that manner which is best suited to them, and best calculated to distinguish them from others, and to paint the different aspects under which the same subjects present themselves to different percep-tions, require as many different styles as the sub-

jects in themselves are varied and diversified. When Mr. Knight, therefore, holds up the simple purity of Xenophon, Cæsar, and Swift, as models of fine writing, he is mistaken in supposing, that purity is confined to the style of these writers; or that it is a style proper and suitable to all subjects. Every subject, handled by a man of genius, suggests a style peculiar to itself—

> —— True expression, like the unchanging sun,
> Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon;
> It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
> Expression is the dress of thought, and still
> Appears more decent as more suitable:
> For different styles with different subjects sort,
> As several garbs with country, town, and court.
>
> POPE.

Purity, so far from being confined to the style of Xenophon, Cæsar, or Swift, may be attained in the style of Milton, Butler, Addison, or any other writer; and the style of Cæsar will be found as void of purity as any other style, if adopted by a writer who has not an exquisite and refined taste. It is not the style, but the execution, that produces purity. Style is known by the general features, or manner of expression peculiar to a writer; but though his manner throughout may be the same, the correctness and truth of his expression will considerably vary, if he want taste and genius; whereas if he possess these qualities, the correct-

ness and truth of his expression will be as invariable as his manner. Purity, simplicity, and the other characters of just and natural expression, are confined to no particular style. Who differ more in their style than Homer and Fontaine? yet simplicity is a quality of style that strongly characterizes each. Whatever is properly expressed is simple, whether it be the description of a rivulet, or the wild and sublime conflict of contending elements. Whatever is expressed as it ought to be, has at once all the characters of purity, simplicity, precision, perspicuity, and elegance; and all these characters of beauty in writing belong not more to one style than another. They enter into every style that is adapted to the subject of which it treats; at least if they do not, their absence is owing, not to the nature of the style, but to the clumsiness of the artist.

"Perfect beauty," says Mr. Knight, "indeed, taking perfect in its most strict, and beauty in its most comprehensive, signification, ought to be equally pleasing to all; but of this, instances are scarcely to be found: for as to taking them, or, indeed, any examples, for illustration, from the other sex of our own species, it is extremely fallacious; as there can be little doubt, that all male animals think the females of their own species the most beautiful productions of nature. At least we know this to be the case among the

different varieties of men, whose respective ideas of the beauties of their females are as widely different as those of man and any other animal can be. The sable Africans view with pity and contempt the marked deformity of the Europeans, whose mouths are compressed, their noses pinched, their cheeks shrunk, their hair rendered lank and flimsy, their bodies lengthened and emaciated, and their skins unnaturally bleached by shade and seclusion, and the baneful influence of a cold, humid climate. Were they to draw an image of female perfection, or a goddess of love and beauty, she would have a broad flat nose, high cheeks, woolly hair, a jet black skin, and squat thick form, with breasts reaching to her navel. To us imagination can scarcely present a more disgusting mass of deformity; but, perhaps, at Tombuctoo, the fairest nymph of St. James's, who, while she treads the mazes of the dance, displays her light and slender form through transparent folds of muslin, might make the same impression. And who shall decide which party is right, or which is wrong? or whether the black model be, according to the laws of nature, the most perfect specimen of a perfect woman."

What Mr. Knight means by "perfect beauty, taking perfect in its most strict, and beauty in its most extensive, signification," I must confess myself ignorant of;—first, because he ends this pas-

sage by talking of "the most perfect specimen of a perfect woman;" from which we are to conclude, not only that there may be different perfect specimens of a perfect woman, but also, that one of these perfect specimens may be more perfect than another. This sort of language conveys no meaning. Perfection admits of no degrees; and it is, therefore, absurd to suppose different perfect specimens of woman, much less of "a perfect woman." Had Mr. Knight written the most perfect specimen of woman, he would have expressed himself very incorrectly; but when he writes the most perfect specimen of a perfect woman, he obviously means something by perfection which no one can comprehend but himself. Mr. Knight tells us elsewhere, that "it is fortunate for our own language that it is not made a specific branch of study in our public schools and colleges, as it thus escapes free from the rules and restrictions in which public professors of rhetoric would fetter and entangle it;" but surely it would be better to study language in a college itself, than to write unintelligibly. I do not wish, however, to take any advantage of Mr. Knight's inaccuracy of expression, or to think his argument of less weight, because it is illogically expressed. I will suppose, that instead of "the most perfect specimen of a perfect woman," he merely intended to say, the perfect specimen

of woman; and still I find myself at a loss to know what he means when he talks of "taking perfect in its most strict, and beauty in its most extensive, signification." If, according to him, there be no such quality in being as beauty, it can have neither an "extensive," nor a limited meaning, much less can it be perfect. When he says, that "instances are *scarcely* to be found" when it gives universal pleasure, does he mean by "scarcely" very seldom? If he does, he admits the existence of perfect beauty, and his whole theory falls to the ground; if he does not, he should have spoken decidedly, and used the negative, *not*, at once, as he would have thus avoided all ambiguity of meaning. If he maintain, that "perfect beauty" is pleasing in no instance whatever, he uses the term perfect beauty according to his own idea of it, or according to the idea attached to it by the public. If he uses it in the former sense, he affirms nothing; for it matters little whether what he means by perfect beauty pleases or not, provided what the public understand by it, imparts that pleasure which he denies: if he uses it in the latter sense, he cannot affirm that it gives no pleasure, till he first tells us what quality, or association of qualities, in sensible or intellectual being, is marked out by the public when they use the term. If he does not know what the public mean by beauty, from

what premises does he conclude, that it is incapable of yielding universal pleasure? If he does know it, he should have told us what it is before he ventured to deny its universal agency; because the public may be as sceptical as he is, and deny that he knows what that beauty is with which they profess to be pleased.

If Mr. Knight speaks from his own knowledge, when he says, that taking instances "from the other sex of our own species is extremely fallacious, as there can be little doubt that all male animals think the females of their own species the most beautiful productions of nature," he possesses a knowledge that is placed beyond the reach of all men but himself. It is impossible that we can know whether brute animals ever think on the subject of beauty at all; but so far as we can reason from analogy, we have a right to conclude, that they never consider the females of their own species more beautiful than those of other species; for if we even granted that they think their own females beautiful, it would not still follow, that they thought them *more* beautiful than any other. The faculty of comparison seems to be confined to man, and it is from this faculty he is distinguished from the brute, by the term *rational.* If the brutes also compare, they are rational as well as man, and they differ only in the degree of accuracy with which they exer-

cise this comparing faculty; but in this, men themselves differ so very considerably, that some have ventured to maintain, that the mind of Newton was farther removed from that of a listless, uninvestigating peasant, than the latter is from the brute. Either, then, they are totally destitute of this faculty, or they are rational as well as man. I apprehend, however, that with regard to man himself, the "instances" would not be so "fallacious" as Mr. Knight is inclined to suppose. There are few men, I believe, who think even one half of the sex beautiful; and the most indifferent judge, much less an *elegans formarum spectator*, would place a greater number of the sex in the rank of ordinary women, than he would in the rank of beauty. If, then, to the former class we add those who are generally deemed ugly and deformed, how greatly must it reduce the proportion of beautiful females. The fact is, that men judge of beauty in women as they judge of it in all other subjects in which it is found; for though an individual may, from certain associations, and peculiar sympathies, of a physical and moral nature, think an ordinary woman beautiful, the generality of mankind will agree in judging of her as they would of all other objects in nature.

The difference of opinion that exists between the black and white nations, with regard to

beauty, is a subject that would lead me into a more ample discussion than I have room for at present. It will be treated at full length in my Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful. I must, however, do Mr. Knight the justice to say, that those who have replied to his arguments merely by endeavouring to prove, that white women are more beautiful than black, have ultimately proved nothing; for as beauty can have no abstract existence, independent of a percipient mind, it necessarily follows, that if the blacks do not perceive any beauty in white women, the sense of female beauty is not universal, and consequently not founded in the common feeling of mankind. I should not, perhaps, have suggested so strong an argument on the part of Mr. Knight, as I must necessarily have to reply to it hereafter; but as the discovery of truth is not only the duty, but the interest, of every writer, I can have no object in concealing any argument that seems to weaken any part of my own theory. If I can disprove it, the theory suffers nothing from it: on the contrary, the removal of a forcible objection is the greatest proof that the theory to which it is opposed is founded in truth: if no satisfactory reply can be given to it, we must necessarily conclude, that the universality of the sense of beauty admits of an exception with regard to the fair sex. But this admission, even if it must be made, does not

oblige us to admit also, that mankind are equally divided in their sense of the beauty of all other objects. Mr. Knight would, therefore, gain but little from this admission, as a theory is never weakened by one exception. The laws of nature frequently cross each other, and though each of them continues to exert its own original and inherent energies, it is only the more powerful law that seems operative to us. If, then, I were obliged to admit one exception in favour of Mr. Knight's scepticism, (an admission which I by no means promise,) I could still maintain, that the sense of beauty is universal, though its influence is not sensibly felt when overpowered by the stronger influence of a more powerful law of nature. Men are naturally attached to the place of their nativity, yet if it be made the scene of perpetual misery and distress to any individual in his youth, this law of natural attachment loses its influence, and he never thinks of it but with aversion and disgust. The laws of nature, therefore, sometimes combat with each other in the breast of man, and the more powerful law must necessarily prevail. If two men, moving in opposite directions, come in contact, the stronger will force the weaker in the same direction with himself. The philosopher, however, will not conclude, that the force by which he endeavours to move eastward has ceased, because he perceives

him moving to the west: he admits the operation of both powers at the same time, and proves their existence by shewing, that he would move still quicker to the west, than he actually does, if he had not exerted all his strength to move eastward. The sense of beauty must not, therefore, be considered extinct whenever it ceases to exert its sensible influence over the heart and its affections. With these observations I must conclude this chapter; hoping I shall be able to give my readers more ample satisfaction regarding the difference of feeling that exists between the Europeans and Africans, relative to the beauty of their respective females, in my Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful.

CHAP. VI

On the Alliance of Taste and Criticism.

To discover the principles by which an author should be guided in the conduct and disposition of his work, is to discover the rules by which the critic should judge of it. Criticism may be defined, *the art of investigating the general and particular merits and defects of literary productions, particularly works of taste and imagination.* The latter works alone are those in which the critic can properly and successfully exert his discriminating acumen, because it is only in these works that a writer of genius can exert all the powers of mind and intellect, with which he is endowed by nature. Here he can display whatever is exquisite in sensibility, pathetic in feeling, sublime in conception, vigorous in expression, rich in imagery, luxuriant in fancy, ennobled in sentiment, chaste in imagination, luminous in perception, elegant in diction, bold in description, judicious in selection, beautiful in design, and harmonious in combination. All these elements

of intellectual beauty are, in a great measure, excluded from works of rigid and abstract science, that have no connexion with the pleasures and the pains, the enjoyments and privations, of human life. The geometrical writer seeks only to discover truth, and to communicate it in simple and perspicuous language. The grace of diction is not what he aims at; nor is it sought for by those who peruse his works; *Ornari præcepta negent, contenta doceri.* The critic, consequently, is not at liberty to censure the want of beauties which were never intended by the author, nor expected by his readers. Pope's precept is particularly applicable to works of this nature:—

> "In every work regard the writer's end,
> Since none can compass more than they intend."

The solution of a geometrical problem depends on principles immutable in their own nature; and when the geometrician has explained these principles to his readers, and arrived at demonstration, he should pursue it no farther. He cannot create a stronger conviction of its truth by new illustrations, or arguments; for demonstration is only weakened by these slighter props of certainty and truth. He may not, therefore, like the writer of taste and imagination, discuss his subject as he pleases; nor has he different ways of teaching it to different people, to render it more

easy and agreeable to their different tastes, and intellects. When Ptolemy became a pupil of Euclid, he found the science in which he wished to be instructed so abstruse, that he expressed a wish to have it rendered more easy and obvious; but his celebrated master informed him, that kings should learn it like other people, or remain ignorant of it, as a particular way of communicating geometrical knowledge could not be invented for them. Not so in works which are proper subjects of critical investigation: we expect something more than simple and homespun truth, because we know, that other objects are aimed at, and other beauties intended by their authors. So far as truth alone is concerned, the poet and the mathematician are both governed by the same laws:—both are amenable to its principles, whenever these principles can be ascertained; but there is this difference, that the principles of mathematical, as of all rigid science, are fixed and incontrovertible, and therefore, like immovable pillars, that equally defy the rage of time and of conflicting elements, they set the power of criticism at nought, and triumph over the ruins of scepticism and incredulity; while the principles of truth, in works of imagination and the elegant arts, are often involved in doubt and perplexity; and though as fixed and immutable as those of science, are not, however,

impressed with those genuine signatures of demonstrative certainty that command our assent, and force conviction whether we will or will not. Hence the critic derives his authority for investigating the merits or defects of writers on subjects of taste; that is, of examining how nearly they have approached to, or how far they have receded from, those principles which, whether true or not, seem to have been most generally agreed upon by mankind. The misfortune, however, is, that the sense of mankind cannot always be collected, in deciding on the merit of any work of art, or the beauty of any particular passage in works of imagination. It is not always easy to say, how mankind would feel affected by either, and the critic and connoisseur are often obliged to judge without any rule but that of their own feelings, when any thing original is presented to them, which they cannot compare to any model of beauty with which they are already acquainted. In works of science, innumerable truths can be demonstrated from a few principles; but in works of taste, principles are eternally varying with circumstances, so that an author's inattention to the slightest circumstance will sometimes render a passage ridiculous, which otherwise would have been in the highest degree sublime. What is an element of beauty in itself, or, in other words, what conveys a noble idea, unconnected

with any other subject, may become improper and inconsistent in composition; and things which convey disagreeable ideas by themselves, may produce the finest effect in composition. What is logically incorrect, when understood in its obvious or apparent sense, may be as certain as that two parallel lines will never meet, when understood in the more refined and philosophic sense which the author annexed to it. The critic, however, if he want candour, may affect to understand it in the literal or apparent sense, and find the author a dunce. I am willing to believe, however, that the most candid critic is often ignorant of the author's meaning, and in this case there appears to him an inconsistency, where there would appear none if properly understood. The author whose mind is impressed with a clear and distinct perception of the truth which he wishes to convey, is often not solicitous about his words, imagining that he addresses himself to those who can feel and think like himself, and knowing that though perspicuity is the chief beauty of style, yet there must be always something left to the judgment of the reader. But if the critic cannot place himself in the same situation with the author, he cannot, consequently, enter into his feelings, nor grasp his spirit. He therefore understands his words in their literal acceptation, and should the author be even Milton or Homer, he

gravely informs the world of his inconsistency or folly. Of these truths, I might quote instances without number: one example, however, of each will suffice; and first, of taking a passage in its literal or obvious meaning, when it should be differently understood. Lord Kaimes, in his Elements of Criticism, quotes the following passage from Milton, as an example of *unnatural sentiment*, and places it among that class of unnatural sentiments that are *inconsistent*:—

> Me miserable! which way shall I fly
> Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is hell: myself am hell;
> And in the *lowest* deep, a *lower* deep
> Still threatening to devour me, opens wide;
> To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.

The words lowest and lower he marks in italics, to shew that the comparative lower is inconsistent, as it is used to express a depth lower than the lowest. It is evident then, that this passage is understood by this distinguished critic, in its more obvious meaning; and thus understood, no person can doubt, that he who has got to the bottom, or lowest depth of hell, can go no farther; but without attempting to refine on the meaning of Milton, it is certain that he wished to convey a moral truth of which Lord Kaimes had no conception whatever, but yet a truth which accords with the experience of every

man who has (and perhaps of those who have not) violated the moral or divine law, and which is also sanctioned by the authority of the sacred writings, to which, it ought to be recollected, Milton had always an attentive eye, namely, that the wicked man, he who always carries hell along with him, imagines, that new punishments are every moment preparing for him, and that when he has even suffered all the torments which hell itself can inflict, he imagines there are still greater and greater punishments which he is destined to endure. Thus Satan, even when precipitated to the *lowest* depth of hell, imagined that he saw a lower hell *still threatening* to devour him. The lowest hell is then the real hell in which Satan was placed: the lower hell is only an imaginary one, created by his own fears; for Milton does not describe it as devouring him, but as threatening to do so.

I have observed, that the same passage will appear sublime or ridiculous, according to the circumstances by which it is accompanied. The following is an instance from the Phedra of Racine, in which Theramene, the companion of Hippolytus, thus describes the sea monster:—

> Le ciel avec horreur voit ce monstre sauvage,
> La terre s'en emeut, l'air en est infecté,
> Le flot qui l'apporta recule appouvanté.

Literally speaking, every word of this descrip-

tion is hyperbolical, I might almost say in the highest degree; or if any exception can be made, it is, that the surrounding atmosphere might possibly be infected by the monster. If, accordingly, this description were given us by a person who had not been present, if it were related in Buffon's History of Animated Nature, or recorded in a newspaper, as a piece of information, it would be absolute rant, and a proof of the most vicious taste; but when it comes from Theramene himself, who was present, and almost petrified with terror at the appearance of the monster; and when we recollect the powerful emotions produced by terror, all the characters of exaggeration fade away, and every thing appears natural, though fearfully sublime. The critic, however, who would judge of this passage without taking into consideration the circumstances in which Theramene was placed, could easily turn it into ridicule, a proof how little we can depend on the commentaries of the critic, if he omit taking into consideration all the circumstances and principles by which his judgment should be determined, or if he cannot perceive how these circumstances and principles mutually affect and are affected by each other.

The following passage will shew that a sentiment which is beautiful in itself, may weaken

the effect, or lessen the beauty, of the sentiments with which it is connected.

> Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
> Some banish'd lover, or some captive maid;
> They live, they speak, they breathe what love inspires,
> Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires;
> The virgin's wish, without her fears, impart,
> Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart;
> Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
> And waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole.

These thoughts are finely imagined; but as they do not agree with the agonizing state of mind in which Eloisa is described, they do not harmonize consequently with the general spirit of the poem, and as Pope himself observes,

> 'Tis not a lip or eye we beauty call,
> But the joint force and full result of all.

That ideas, or images, disagreeable in themselves may produce the finest effect in composition will appear manifest from Milton's description of Death.

> ——————— The other shape,
> If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;
> Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd;
> For each seem'd either. Black he stood as night,
> Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
> And shook a deadly dart. What seem'd his head
> The likeness of a kingly crown had on.

I doubt whether human genius could array the king of terrors in more suitable drapery. Yet it is evident, that every image in this grand and sublime portrait taken separately, is fearful and disagreeable, and rather an element of deformity than of beauty. Beauty and sublimity, therefore, are not composed of elements, or materials, beautiful and sublime in themselves, or which individually and separately excite the emotions of sublimity and beauty; for, as Lord Byron observes, in his letter on Bowles's Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope, "A great artist will make a block of stone as sublime as a mountain; and a good poet can imbue a pack of cards with more poetry than inhabits the forests of America. It is the business and the proof of a poet to give the lie to the proverb, and sometimes to '*make a silken purse out of a sow's ear.*'"

From the examples which I have now quoted, it appears, not only that every object, real or imaginary, sensible or intellectual, may be rendered sublime and beautiful by the magic of poetry; but also, that though there are certain fixed principles of criticism with which we must be perfectly acquainted, before we can venture to offer an opinion on the beauties of composition, yet there can be no *system* of criticism invented which will enable us to apply these principles with certainty, in all cases; because the princi-

ples of taste eternally vary with the circumstances to which they are applied, and in this respect differ essentially from the principles of science, and demonstrative reasoning. All system-makers, therefore, only impose on themselves and on their readers, when they pretend to lay down rules and principles in matters of taste, from which there can be no exceptions, but those which they point out themselves. A rule or principle of criticism is only applicable in certain cases; but when cases nearly similar arise, the rule must be modified and adapted to the change of circumstance. But how shall we modify a rule of which we are ignorant? It is true the rule leads us astray if we apply it without any modification, and this appears to me to be the chief reason why rules are objected to; but it should be recollected, that the rule leads us into error only because we had not penetration enough, or common sense, to perceive that the case to which we applied it was different from the case for which the rule was intended; and he who has not common sense enough to perceive where cases and circumstances differ, can have no pretensions to that critical sagacity which would have guided him safely, without having recourse to the rules, precepts, or principles of criticism.

It is obvious, therefore, that rules are an infallible guide only to those who have received from

nature that discriminating perception which detects the slightest alteration in circumstances and situations; but to him who is not blessed with this original acumen of mind, they serve as mere landmarks, which do not trace out the exact line that separates beauty from deformity, or truth from error. The critic who can exercise no higher judgment than what he is enabled to exercise by the aid of those rules and canons of criticism which have been laid down in professed works of taste, or which he has collected from his own observations on the works of elegant writers, will therefore be frequently at a loss how to decide, if he possess that salutary caution which arises from good sense and prudence—the most valuable, if not the most exalted, qualities of a critic; but if he want this caution, he will often praise where no praise is due, and discover blemishes in the most sublime and finished productions of human genius. Hence it is, that the world has been so much divided, or at least all ancient and modern commentators, in deciding on the merit of particular passages in the Greek and Roman poets; the passage that appeared grand and sublime to one commentator, not appearing so to another. Yet each judges by principles of his own, and these principles may be all correct, when they do not clash with other principles that either lessen or entirely supersede

their authority, in the particular case in question. The critic, however, thinks, that the passage in dispute can only be decided by those principles on which he rests his judgment, because he identifies the case in point with other cases to which he found the same principles had been applied before him by other writers, or because he cannot perceive any other that can be referred to; and if any of the principles by which his judgment should have been determined lie concealed from him, he must judge at a venture; because he is incapable of perceiving how the principles that lie open to him are affected by those which are concealed. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light," is a passage quoted by Longinus as an example of the true sublime, and with his opinion most writers have agreed. Yet it has been warmly contested by two celebrated French critics, Boileau and Huet; the former agreeing with, and the latter dissenting from, the authority of Longinus.

It would seem, that erroneous principles could never lead us to form the same judgment which a just feeling would primarily suggest, as the former would always lead us into error; but it is certain, however, that many writers deduce just conclusions from false principles. It is true, that he who adopts a false principle at setting out, must unavoidably come to a false conclu-

sion, if he be consistent with himself throughout; but men who possess correct feelings without a knowledge of principles to regulate their judgments, have often the art of wandering from the truth, and returning to it again, regardless of consequences, not perceiving how their positions and principles clash with each other. They wander like a man in the dark, who knows the direction to which he is going, but, from being unable to descry all the objects which lie in his way, receives several knocks before he can reach it. Sometimes on finding himself suddenly stopped, he turns aside to the left perhaps, in which direction he is obliged to travel a considerable distance before he can turn round to the place of his destination; whereas if he only inclined to the right, a few paces would have led him into the straight road. But whatever interruptions he meets with, he keeps the point to which he is bound always in his head, and reaches it at length, however he may be driven backwards and forwards by his ignorance of the road. It is so with him who has just feelings, but whose mind is not furnished with principles to do them justice. Just feelings will always direct us to adopt just principles, if we are antecedently acquainted with them; but if not, it is better to decide in favour of our feelings at once, than attempt to prove them by principles; for there may not be, in the small stock we

possess, one principle that would prove our feelings right, and in this case, we must unavoidably have recourse to wrong ones; which we find, is almost always the case with ignorant people. If a peasant be contradicted when he advances a truth, of which the light of common sense renders him as certain as the geometrician is that two right lines cannot inclose a space, he will advance many arguments in support of it, all of which may be erroneous and absurd; but though we may convince him that all his arguments are erroneous, we shall never succeed in convincing him, that the original truth which he laboured to defend is equally so. Our feelings, or common sense, will therefore frequently secure us from error, when our principles, or rather our ignorance of them, would lead us into the wildest inconsistencies.

Lord Kames, who agrees with Huet, that the passage quoted from Moses is not sublime, appears to me to have formed a very right judgment, but to have supported it by untenable and erroneous principles. He seems, therefore, to have been determined by his feelings, at setting out, to form this judgment; but being ignorant of the true principles, that would have proved it void of sublimity, he was necessarily obliged to have recourse to false ones. "The emotion of sublimity," he says, "raised by this image, is but

momentary, and the mind, unable to support itself in an elevation so much above nature, immediately sinks down into humility, and veneration for a being so far exalted above grovelling mortals." And again, "in describing superior beings, the reader's imagination, unable to support itself in a strained elevation, falls often as from a height, and sinks even below its ordinary tone." Both these remarks he applies to the passage in question; but it is obvious, that the last remark is applicable to no particular passage; for if it be maintained, that in the description of superior beings the mind *often* falls as from a height, it is allowing, at least, that *sometimes* it does not fall, and how are we to know, whether the present instance should be referred to the often, or the sometimes? If we can sometimes read the description of superior beings without feeling any sensible depression, it is evident, that it is not the mere presence, or introduction, of the superior beings that creates this depression, but some other circumstance connected with the description, and unless we know what this other circumstance is, we cannot possibly determine whether the mind will sink or not, except from the mere impulse of our own feelings; but even then we cannot ascribe the mental depression to the description of superior beings, as we are certain that there are many descriptions of superior beings in which we

are conscious of a great and ennobling elevation of mind. The first objection which Lord Kames makes to the sublimity of this passage is, that it is momentary, and so highly elevated above nature, that the mind cannot support itself. To explain this, he observes, that "Grandeur, being an extreme vivid emotion, is not readily produced in perfection, but by reiterated impressions." This is using the words grandeur and sublimity as synonymous terms, and if we only agree to annex the same ideas to each, it can make no difference in our conclusions; but I believe there are few who consider sublimity as a vivid emotion; and if we only judge by our own feelings when a sublime object is presented to us, or a sublime image described in words, our emotions, so far from partaking of a vivid character, are rather expressive of awe, veneration, respect, and sometimes a mixed feeling of satisfaction and terror. Grandeur, I am aware, is sometimes applied to representations that create vivid and pleasing emotions; and for this reason I think it was not happily used by Lord Kames, in an argument where a sublime emotion alone was to be accounted for. By an ambiguous use of words we can explain away any emotion, or feeling, and make it assume the dress and habit of some other, which, though similar to it in some of its appearances, is widely different from it in others. In

my opinion, grandeur is more properly applied to objects in which beauty and sublimity are combined, where sublimity is softened into beauty, and beauty exalted to sublimity; but the true sublime has nothing in it of a vivid character; and even if it had, it would be easy to shew, that the true sublime is produced in perfection by a single representation, or image, without reiterating the impression. The following line from Virgil conveys but one distinct image to the mind, and this image is expressed in half the number of words contained in the controverted passage before us.

Aspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum.

No person will deny that this image of the heavens, tottering beneath its own weight, produces a sublime emotion, and is consequently an instance of the true sublime; and therefore, though I am of the same opinion with Lord Kames, that the passage quoted from Moses is not sublime, yet I deny that this want of sublimity arises from its conveying but one single image, or making a single impression on the mind. I could quote passages without number that are confined to one single image, and yet in the highest degree sublime; but one example proves as much as a thousand.

A single image may, therefore, produce a sub-

lime emotion, in the highest degree, and I doubt whether there be not some cases in which the effect would lose rather than gain by reiterating the impression—and if the passage from Moses be not sublime, it is not because it conveys but a single image to the mind, nor yet because it expresses this image in a few words, for the line which I have quoted from Virgil has still fewer words. The two following images are still shorter than either, and yet each of them sublime in itself.

> ——— Ponto nox incubat atra:
> Intonuere poli.

It is evident, then, that whatever be the characteristic of the true sublime, it is not confined to a multiplicity of images, nor to a multiplicity of words, though images rising above each other in grandeur will certainly increase the effect. Neither does it depend on the greatness of the effect which is described; for can any effect be conceived greater than that of light starting into existence, at the creative *fiat* of the Almighty? and yet I think it can be shewn, that the description of it by Moses is not sublime. But if sublimity does not always belong to a great effect, neither does it always belong to a great object. The Deity itself, if painted by an unskilful hand, will not appear sublime in the description; while an eagle, between whom and the Deity we cannot

even force a comparison, will appear sublime, when painted by the bold and creative pencil of genius,

> ——— "Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deeps of air."

Hitherto, then, it appears, that Lord Kames is unsuccessful in his arguments, to shew that the description of the new-born light by Moses is not sublime. His only remaining objection to its sublimity, viz.—that "the mind, unable to support itself in an elevation so much above nature, immediately sinks down into humility, and veneration for a being so far exalted above grovelling mortals," is equally untenable, and differs in no respect from what he had already said regarding the mental depression which is often felt in describing, or rather in perusing, the description of superior beings. If this argument be just, it proves that the more sublime any description is, the less sublime it is; for the higher any writer lifts us by his imagery, the greater must be our descent. It also proves, that the Deity can never be made the subject of sublime description, unless a gradation of inferior beings is described after him, which enables us to descend gradually to our own humble species. But what is there so much elevated above nature in the words "God said, Let there be light, and there was light?" I am inclined to think, that it is the want

of this elevation that deprives it of its sublime character. The light is as familiar to us, and belongs as much to the planet which we inhabit, as it does to any of the ethereal tracts that are elevated above us; and if we were not to consult reason on the subject, the light would appear to our senses more the creature of the earth, than of any part of the visible creation, except the sun. Light is, then, an object with which we are so extremely familiar, that it is impossible to render it the subject of a sublime description, unless it be clothed with ennobling circumstances that exalt the mind, or unless some particular light be described so elevated that it draws our attention to itself, and diverts it from that common and universal light which we enjoy upon earth. It is this common, universal light, however, which is described by Moses; and I ask any reader, whether he feels his mind lifted up to any particular elevated object, when he peruses the words "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." The mind remains where it is, as it finds the object described surrounding it in all directions; or if it move at all, it suffers its ideas to rove at large, without any particular direction, which can never take place when a sublime emotion is felt, as this emotion lifts up the mind forcibly and irresistibly, and fixes it on the object by which the emotion is produced. When we

direct our eyes to the blue arch of the heavens, and endeavour to penetrate into the immensity of space, we are not conscious of any emotions created by the idea of light still advancing forwards, and filling the infinite void; on the contrary, an abyss of impenetrable and interminable darkness presents itself to our view. The earth, then, appears to our senses the proper abode of light and happiness, and, if the idea of light ever wafts us to the heavens, it is only to that part of them where the sun appears; but the impression which is felt in talking of the sun, is clearly distinct from what is felt in talking of light, so much so, that we often use the word light without ever thinking of the sun. The reason appears to be, that the sun conveys other ideas besides that of light, as heat, flame, solidity, &c.—and also that it is a clearly distinct, visible, and particular object; but the light never affects us as a particular object in itself, but as something that enables us to distinguish all other objects; something that is no where complete, and yet every where. It wants that character of individuality, or of distinct and separate existence, which fixes the mind on itself; and without which a sublime emotion can never be produced. But if we could suppose the light removed from this earth, and appearing as something that stood by itself, and which became a distinct object of perception,

and an object too which we should respect the more as it became the less familiar, I am inclined to think that it could then be made a subject of very sublime description; for an object with which we are familiar, will seldom, if ever, produce a sublime emotion, unless the circumstances connected with it in description render it sublime. The fact is, that in the passage from Moses, there is nothing to elevate the mind; there is no certain fixed object to which it can direct itself, and which is capable of supporting it; and hence it is, that it feels the depression which Lord Kames and Huet so justly admit, but for which they have been certainly unable to account. Whenever any great effect is described, the mind naturally rises, but if it feel itself blindly rising without an object, it falls back upon itself, and is conscious of a depression rather than an elevation. Light, when described as an elevated, particular object, distinct from the universal light, which we all enjoy, is capable of becoming a subject of sublime description, as in the following verse in the Messiah:—

> Rise, crown'd with light, imperial Salem, rise,
> Exalt thy tow'ry head ———.

The light that forms this crown, placed on the towery head of Salem, is not only elevated, but it is supposed to be a particular strong and

radiant light, confined to Salem alone. The mind has, therefore, no difficulty in discovering the object that produces the sublime emotion. But if this particular and elevated light, which rests on the head of Salem, were changed into the common light of day, that light of which Moses speaks, the sublime effect would have been lost, as

> Arise to light, imperial Salem, rise.

The want of sublimity in the passage quoted from Moses, is not, therefore, owing to its elevating the mind so much above nature, but to its not elevating it at all; or rather, to its not elevating it to any particular direction, or fixing it on any particular object; for mere elevation does not produce this mental depression, but when we can discover no object in this elevated situation with which we may commune. Moses presents no such image to the mind; for the mind, in contemplating the light, does not naturally lift itself up, but rather expands itself around the heavens, or strays along the sensible horizon that limits our sight; and expansion or diffusion of thought weakens the sublime effect. It is not then simple elevation, but elevation without an object, that depresses the mind. Can any elevation be conceived more exalted than the following:—

> Now had the Almighty power from above,
> From the pure empyrean where he sits
> *High throned above all height*, bent down his eye.

Here is an elevation so high, that in contemplating it we feel a kind of mental giddiness, but then we do not fall back upon ourselves, and retire from the scene. We still wish to look up, because we have there something to look upon, and which supports us thus seated, on the very pinnacle of creation. When Milton describes the Creator ascending from earth to heaven after the creation was complete, we feel no difficulty in ascending with him, and we look down upon the earth with as much confidence and security as if we were gods ourselves. Nor do we feel a consciousness of our insufficiency and weakness, though we travel up in company with all the host of heaven. How then can the mind, according to Lord Kames, "fall below its ordinary tone," when superior beings are described, when it is daring enough to associate with those beings, and even with the Deity himself, without any sense of its own unworthiness? The truth is, that the mind only falls when it has nothing to support it; and when it finds itself in a strange place without company, it naturally wishes to return back to its own habitation. When this is not the case, the mind of man, impressed with a sense of its own divine nature, with a certain anticipation of

the great theatre on which it is to move hereafter, and of which every virtuous and noble mind feels itself not unworthy—impressed with the hallowed pride of the inspired penman, when, addressing the Deity in admiration of man, he exclaims, "thou hast made him but a *little lower* than the angels, thou hast *crowned* his head with *glory and honour;* thou hast put all things *under his feet*"—impressed with these feelings, the mind of man shrinks not from contemplating the most elevated image, or the sublimest order of superior beings, to which the pencil of genius can assign "a local habitation and a name;" but when they want this local habitation and name, when sublime objects are presented to the mind, rather as abstract representations than as sensible images, the mind is confused, reason seeks for a clue, and the first exercise of reason dispels the mental phantom and the sublime emotion. The mind of man rises with whatever is great; it retreats, not from a consciousness of its own inferiority, but, in proportion as it accustoms itself to sublime contemplations, in the same proportion does it despise whatever is low and grovelling, and claim kindred only with celestial alliances. Our very bodies partake of, and sympathize with, the expansion of the mind, and we seem to swell and grow big, whenever a grand and sublime image is presented to us. This is

finely described by Cicero, who, of all the philosophers, seems to have formed the highest idea of the dignity and divine origin of our nature. "*Est animorum,*" he says, "*ingeniorumque quoddam quasi pabulum, consideratio, contemplatioque naturæ.* ERIGIMUR, ELEVATIORES FIERI VIDEMUR; *humana despicimus; cogitantesque supera atque cælestia, hæc nostra, ut exigua et minima contemnimus.*"

If the mind of man, then, shrink from a high elevation, it is only when it finds nothing, or at least nothing of sufficient interest, to detain it there. Then only does it find its situation uneasy; not, however, from a sense of its own unworthiness, but from a feeling that there is nothing in this elevated situation worthy of its attention. The passage to which I have alluded in Milton, will shew with what ease we can associate with the highest order of intelligences, and attempt the heaven of heavens itself, when permitted to mingle with the celestial train.

"So even and morn accomplish'd the sixth day,
Yet not till the Creator from his work
Desisting, though unwearied, up return'd,
Up to the heaven of heavens, his high abode,
Thence to behold this new-created world.
——————————— Up he rode,
Follow'd with acclamations, and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps, that tuned
Angelic harmony; the earth, the air
Resounding ———————————

The heavens and all the constellations rung,
The planets in their stations listening stood,
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant."

It is an error then to suppose, that the mind; "unable to support itself in an elevation so much above nature, immediately sinks down into humility." The truth is, that it is not sufficient to present to the mind a great and powerful effect, unless it be presented in such a manner, that it excites a great and sublime emotion in the mind. If a great effect, or an object of great magnitude, could of itself produce this sublime emotion, nothing would be left to the creative pencil of genius, and the greatest dunce could place an object in as sublime a point of view as Homer or Milton.

Boileau, who maintains this passage to be sublime against Huet, and M. Le Clerc, who took up the controversy on the part of Huet, is extremely confused in his arguments on the subject; and this is the more surprising, as he is perhaps the most critically correct writer in the French language. Sometimes he rests his argument, not on the true nature of a sublime emotion, but on that particular idea which Longinus attached to it, and which entirely consists in the mere turn of expression; and at another time he affects to meet the question fairly, and to prove it sublime, abstracted from the peculiar or limited

notions of any individual. This appears to me quite inconsistent: it is, in fact, giving up the sublimity of the passage altogether; for if it be sublime only according to that particular idea which Longinus attached to sublimity, why attempt to prove it sublime in the general acceptation of the term? or if it be sublime in the latter sense, why submit to the necessity of defending it only as that kind of sublimity which Longinus intended to express? His attempt to prove it sublime, according to our general notions of sublimity, and without availing himself of Longinus's particular idea of it, is extremely weak. "*Le sublime,*" he says, "*n'est pas proprement une chose qui se prouve et qui se démontre; mais c'est un merveilleux qui saisit, qui frappe, et qui se fait sentir.*" So far we must agree with him;—the character of the sublime emotion is very happily expressed; but what a falling off appears in the next sentence: "*Ainsi personne ne pouvant entendre prononcer* UN PEU MAJESTUEUSEMENT *ces paroles,* QUE LA LUMIERE SE FASSE, *etc. sans que cela excite en lui une certaine élévation d'ame qui lui fait plaisir; il n'est plus question de savoir s'il y a du sublime dans ces paroles, puisqu'il y en a indubitablement.*" Here we are told, that if the words "God said, Let there be light," &c. be pronounced somewhat majestically, we cannot avoid feeling a certain elevation of soul; whence it follows, that if they

be not pronounced so, the sublime effect will not be produced; for why render it necessary to pronounce them majestically, if they produce the sublime emotion without it? The sublimity of the passage will therefore depend on pronouncing them after a certain manner, and consequently the sublime emotion is produced, not by the words themselves, but by the pronunciation. Boileau, perhaps, could not discover a stronger argument to prove these words not sublime, than to admit the necessity of having recourse to the artificial sublimity of sound to enable them to produce an emotion which they could not produce of themselves. He tried, no doubt, the experiment on himself, and first simply repeated the words, endeavouring, probably, at the same time, to excite a sublime emotion in his own mind like the priestess Phemonoe in Lucan, endeavouring to work herself into a false inspiration.

> "Deum simulans, sub pectore ficta quieto
> Verba refert, nullo confusæ murmure vocis,
> Instinctam sacro mentem testata furore;"

but suspecting that the emotion which he felt was not genuine, that it was too vague and indistinct to be that strongly marked and instantaneous emotion, *qui saisit, qui frappe, et qui se fait sentir*, he had recourse to the majesty of pronunciation to assist in promoting the effect. Unhappily, however, it follows, that if a certain manner

of pronouncing a passage be necessary to render it sublime, there can be no sublimity in any passage, antecedent to its being pronounced; and to him who is not blessed with a good delivery, no passage can be sublime till he hears it read by another. Homer, consequently, can have no merit for the abundance of sublime passages which are to be met with in the Iliad, as they have no sublimity in themselves, and are only the materials out of which a well-voiced speaker can produce sublime emotions. It is certain, however, that a passage truly sublime requires not the supervenient aid of pronunciation, or rhetorical delivery; for true sublimity in writing consists in the image or images that are presented to the mind; or in the circumstances in which they are clothed and introduced; and where such images and circumstances are properly connected, it requires no pomp of pronunciation to render them sublime. We need not, therefore, move a lip in reading the following passage to perceive its sublimity:—

> ——— "On a sudden open fly,
> With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
> Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
> Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook
> Of Erebus."

If then Longinus, Boileau, and most critics, have been mistaken in their judgments of this

noted passage, and if each of them has advanced principles in support of his judgment, a question naturally arises, how is a critic to determine between opposite authorities? He may, like them, advance principles on the one side or the other; but how is he to prove his principles right? or how satisfy his readers that the judgments of those to whom he stands opposed, are wrong? To these questions, perhaps, we may venture to reply by observing, that as all the principles of taste are originally founded in feeling, the critic must not only shew, that the principles on which he rests his judgment, are derived from the laws of feeling, but that there is nothing in the case on which he decides, to give the feelings on which these principles are founded a new modification—nothing to repress their ardour, or to stimulate their activity; in a word, that they are the feelings which properly belong to the case in point. He must likewise shew, that the principles to which he stands opposed are not founded in human nature, and are contrary to the feelings on which they profess to be founded; or otherwise, that though they are, they are not the feelings which properly belong to the question to be decided; that there are particular circumstances connected with it, which escaped the attention of those whose judgment he opposes; that these circumstances involved feelings of which they could not be aware; and that, con-

sequently, the feelings on which they founded their judgment, were not properly those which belonged to, or which were felt on the occasion. He who omits any circumstance connected with the cause of an emotion, must consequently be ignorant of the nature of the emotion, because he is ignorant of the new emotion which this circumstance would have produced, or at least of the turn which it would have given the emotions that would have taken place if this circumstance did not exist. Lord Kames would have avoided many injudicious criticisms, had he paid a strict attention to the feelings by which the passages on which he comments are dictated. His observations, and the principles by which he judges, are generally correct; but the feelings on which his principles are founded, are not those which he ought to have supposed were felt by the writer on whom he comments: if they were, his judgments and his principles could seldom be shaken. The critic may, therefore, possess principles without end, and still form very imperfect and erroneous judgments, unless he apply them with a due regard to all that endless variety of minute and latent circumstances which produce new feelings, of which the critic must be ignorant if these circumstances escape his attention. Principles in criticism, are only observations on the manner in which men are affected by different

causes at different times. A man tells me, how he felt on a certain occasion: another man tells me that the same cause produced a similar feeling in him. I note down the feeling accordingly, and say, it is a principle in human nature to feel so and so, when such a cause takes place. But though this principle is rigidly and philosophically true, how apt am I to be deceived by it; for the same cause will not produce the same effect the next time, if the slightest alteration takes place in the circumstances in which the man is placed; and even granting the circumstances to remain the same, the effect will fail if the cause varies in the slightest degree.

If, then, the cause of any particular emotion, or the circumstances under which this emotion was felt, should vary in the slightest degree, the emotion will vary along with it; but if this slight change either in the cause, or in the circumstances, should escape the attention of the observer, he will judge as he did before, and consequently he will judge erroneously; not that the principle by which he judges is false, but that the case to which it is applied is different from that on which it is founded. We cannot ourselves always perceive any difference in the causes that act upon us, or in the circumstances under which we are placed, though we clearly perceive our feelings are not the same as on former occa-

sions, that appeared to be similar. But though we cannot perceive the change, our feelings, true to nature, are, if not as much affected by it as if we did perceive it, at least moved by it to a considerable degree. If any thing crosses a man's temper in the morning, and his mind is withdrawn from it in the course of the day by a multiplicity of pursuits, or other objects of attention, yet no abstraction of mind can entirely remove the impression: nature holds it fast, though the attention is engrossed by other objects; and he will find himself differently affected by every circumstance that occurs in the course of the day, from what he would have been if this cross occurrence had not taken place. What would have given him the highest pleasure, at another time, will now produce a mixed feeling of satisfaction and uneasiness, though he has, perhaps, totally forgot the occurrence by which it is produced. Hence, then, a critic cannot possibly determine whether a sentiment becomes an author or not, or whether it naturally expresses the passion by which he is supposed to be actuated, unless he attend to every minute circumstance connected with his immediate situation, and has penetration enough to discern what determination the minor circumstances are likely to give to the general passion. Two men labouring under any species of strong apprehension, or terror, may neither

feel alike nor express themselves alike, and yet each of them feel and express himself naturally. If the critic, then, in judging of any expressions in an author, supposed to come from a person labouring under some terror, should attend only to the nature of terror in general, the state of feeling which it is apt to produce in the mind, and the expressions natural to such a state of feeling, he will, in all probability, assert, that the manner in which this person has expressed himself, is neither correct nor natural, when it is both one and the other. Where terror is produced by immediate danger, a person will express his fears differently from a person who only expresses his sense of a more remote, but not less certain, danger. When a person is threatened with a punishment which he deserves, he will express himself very differently from him who is equally threatened, but conscious of no crime that merits chastisement. Lord Kames, in censuring the following passage of Corneille, forgets this distinction, and seems to think, that a sense of fear is always expressed alike, by whatever circumstances it happens to be accompanied. "Ptolemy," he says, "by putting Pompey to death, having incurred the displeasure of Cæsar, was in the utmost dread of being dethroned. In this agitating situation, Corneille makes him utter a

speech full of cool reflection, that is in no degree expressive of the passion."

Ah! si je t'avois crû, je n'aurois pas de maître,
Je serois dans le trône où le ciel m'a fait naître;
Mais c'est une imprudence assez commune aux rois,
D'écouter trop d'avis, et se tromper au choix:
Le destin les aveugle au bord du precipice;
Ou si quelque lumière en leur ame se glisse,
Cette fausse clarté dont il les éblouit
Les plonge dans une gouffre, et puis s'évanouit.

La Mort de Pompée, Act 4, Scene 1.

Here it is taken for granted by Lord Kames, that the predominant passion which actuated Ptolemy was fear, or terror; but can any thing be more evident than that these lines are more expressive of sorrow and self-condemnation, than they are of fear? and can any thing be more natural than such feelings after the crime of which he was guilty; and the punishment with which he was threatened in consequence of it? Ptolemy, then, does not express himself like a person who was under no influence but that of fear: if he did, Lord Kames, censure would have been just; but before we can admit its justice, it must be shewn, that sorrow and self-reproach are not natural to a person who is conscious of a crime, and threatened with punishment. This no one will maintain, and it is therefore clear, that if Lord Kames had put

himself in the place of Ptolemy, and then consulted his own feelings, instead of judging by the abstract principle of fear, they would have directed him to adopt other principles in judging of this passage; and instead of censuring Corneille for the words which he has put into the mouth of Ptolemy, he would have immediately recognized their propriety. Could it even be supposed that Ptolemy felt no real sorrow for his conduct, yet it was but reasonable that he should affect it, and that he should even seem to feel it more than the passion of fear, allowing it to be predominant in his mind; for Lord Kames himself has justly observed elsewhere, that "it is against the order of nature that passion, in any case, should take the lead, in contradiction to reason and conscience. Such a state of mind is a sort of anarchy, which every one is ashamed of, and endeavours to hide or dissemble."

Our principles, therefore, must always be accompanied by our feelings, in judging of the beauties or defects of composition. No critic ever attained to eminence who judged by principles in the abstract; whereas Homer and Shakspeare, the two greatest poets, perhaps, that ever wrote, were solely guided by their own feelings. Their numerous faults and violations of purity, however, demonstrate the impossibility of acquiring taste without principles, experience,

and discussion; though they may reach to beauties to which the most refined and cultivated taste will never attain.

Principles will not, therefore, avail him who does not try them by his feelings; because he cannot possibly avoid applying them erroneously: he will use them like the apothecary, who always applies the same remedy to the same disease. The true critic may be very aptly compared to a physician, whose prescriptions are determined, not by the name or general nature, but by the immediate peculiarity of character that marks the complaint; who varies his practice with its different stages in the same individual, and with the same stage in different individuals; and who combines with these considerations, all the infinite varieties of constitution, habit, modes of life, and mental influences, incident to man. The experienced physician never treats the same complaint in the same manner, if the slightest diversity appears in the symptoms which it presents, or in the constitution of the patient; while the apothecary scarcely ever varies his practice. It is so with the critic who does not possess a refined and elegant taste: his principles of judging are fixed and invariable, and he always applies the same principles to all cases that appear to him to be the same. The true critic proceeds as the physician does: he examines his subject in all its bearings, resolves

it into all its component parts, examines how these parts harmonize with each other, points out such of them as are mere excrescences, and which ought to be entirely expunged, and also those which are improperly disposed of, and placed where they cannot produce that full effect which they would have done in their proper place. But the most exquisite feelings would no more enable him to do this without principles, than the most general knowledge of natural philosophy would enable the physician to vary his practice without a perfect knowledge of the principles of his own immediate art, and the general manner in which they are applied. Though his practice is, therefore, always particular and always varied, it is still always influenced by the general practice and principles of his art; and it is certain, that if he were ignorant of these general principles, the power of varying and applying them differently in different cases would be at an end. The physician has no advantage over the apothecary but what results from having a greater number of principles to regulate his judgment. The apothecary may use the few principles by which he is guided with prudence and discretion; but when a complaint presents a new appearance, he is bewildered; because he has no principle to direct his judgment in such a case. His patient, therefore, must necessarily be in danger, whether

he follow his old practice, or adopt a new one. The old practice cannot be right, because every new appearance, or symptom, requires a variation in the means applied; and a new practice may be still more dangerous, because it is regulated, not by principles, but by chance, or vague conjecture. The apothecary knows not what physical cause produces such a modification in the complaint, and consequently knows not what remedy to apply; but the physician knows, not only the cause of all the symptoms, but also under what circumstances such symptoms will be changed, or accompanied by new ones, and this knowledge enables him to adopt a new practice with certainty and success. The true critic differs from the bad one just as the physician differs from the apothecary: his mind is enriched with a greater diversity of knowledge, and a more extensive acquaintance with the general principles of criticism, or rather an acquaintance with a greater number of principles, which enable him to judge of a greater variety of appearances in sensible and intellectual objects. He can, therefore, discern, at a glance, a thousand harmonies, discords, relations, disagreements, and intimate, though latent, alliances, which are concealed from the unpractised and inexperienced mind. He knows that certain qualities generally accompany certain other qualities; and where he perceives the for-

mer, he naturally seeks for the latter. Wherever he perceives certain proportions in a building, he is pleased to find other subordinate proportions which he knows are necessary to produce the general harmony of the whole, and displeased if they are not observed; but he who does not possess this antecedent knowledge, never, perhaps, directs his attention to these minor proportions at all, and cannot consequently determine how far the beauty of proportions is observed, as he only judges by the general effect, or impression, which it makes on him at the moment. The proportions of the different parts of a building might, therefore, for aught that he knows, have been more or less beautiful than they are. But if a style of building, different from any with which we are at present acquainted, were invented by a modern architect, if all the forms and proportions were changed, the connoisseur could no longer be guided by principles alone; because principles must always relate to what is already acknowledged beautiful by the generality of those who are qualified to judge. Here, then, the man who is best acquainted with the principles of judging, should consult his feelings, as well as the man who always judges by feeling alone; but then how different would be the feelings of both: those of the latter would be, as usual, vague and uncertain; they would be excited only by the more

striking appearances which this new style of building would present; but the feelings of him whose mind is stored with the general principles of beauty and elegance in building, would not be influenced solely by this impression. Such a man would immediately run over all the parts and proportions of a building in this new style, and discover, at a glance, relations, harmonies, proportions, and disproportions, which the latter would never discern. He can perceive nothing in a new style of building so perfectly new as totally to elude all the principles by which he has been accustomed to judge of architectural beauty; and consequently he can apply the same principles of judging to the former, with such modifications as a long habit of comparison, and the feelings excited at themoment, conjointly dictate.

It is certain, however, that though principles not only direct our judgment, but create, by habit, that mental activity which traces and explores all the parts and relations of an object at a glance, and all the evidences of harmony and design which it contains, our judgments will still be doubtful and subject to error, unless we consult our feelings as well as our principles, in all the qualities of an object that are new and without precedent. He who always judges by principles alone can never possess a refined and elegant taste; and if he stand high in the literary world

he will unavoidably tend to vitiate the public taste, whether he praise or dispraise. The fame of a great writer cannot suffer long from the obloquy or injustice of unmerited censure: those who are qualified to judge of his merits, have also discrimination to detect every futile attempt to bring it into disrepute; and those who are not judges, generally prefer public opinion to individual strictures. But the commentaries of him who sits down to bestow unqualified praise, without the necessary qualifications of a critic, not only gives a wrong bias to the public taste, but inevitably detracts from the merits which he wishes to eulogize. Whatever is exquisitely beautiful in sentiment or expression, must be too refined and delicate for the grosser tact of the uninitiated; and therefore they must pass them over to extol only what is palpable and tactile. He who reads the works of the poets, without any guide to direct his taste, insensibly imbibes a relish for whatever is elegant in diction, natural in description, pathetic in feeling, and sublime in conception; but the correctness of judgment, which is thus acquired, becomes vitiated, if, in reading them, he be guided by the commentaries of an injudicious critic. In adopting his sentiments, with regard to what is more and what is less beautiful, his taste becomes progressively worse and worse; because he refers all his ideas of

beauty to that false standard of elegance, by which the critic taught him to regulate his judgment and opinions. In reading good works, therefore, no matter whether poetry or prose, our judgment becomes insensibly more correct, if left to ourselves in the selection of what is right, and the rejection of what is wrong, or, at least, what appear to be such; for though we are liable to judge erroneously, yet, as all our opinions are formed, in the first instance, with some degree of hesitation, when left without a guide, we have no difficulty in rejecting whatever erroneous sentiments we adopt, when more extensive reading enlarges the sphere of our knowledge, or when we afterwards find these erroneous judgments combated and disproved by writers who incidentally treat of them. But if our minds be already prepossessed by the commentaries of an erring guide, on whose judgment we are taught to rely, we superciliously smile at the want of taste, or weakness of judgment, which appear to characterize every writer whose style or manner does not quadrate with our notions of elegance and correctness. Whoever has attended to the progress of his own mind, in his early pursuits after knowledge, knows how apt he is to distrust his own conclusions, and how fondly he seeks for some riper judgment by which they may be confirmed. This distrust is, perhaps, the safest

guide, and the happiest bias which nature could bestow on the youthful mind. But as the taste and judgment of a child may be for ever vitiated, when left to the guidance of an ignorant tutor, so must the public taste suffer by the false light of injudicious criticism. To what is the corruption of the Latin language to be attributed, if not to the growth of false taste, occasioned by a strained, unnatural elevation of sentiment? Seneca and his contemporaries could not relish the pure and simple beauties of the classic writers of the Augustan age: they set up a standard of perfection for themselves; founded all their judgments of literary excellence on stubborn, unbending, and abstract principles; and, instead of trying their principles by their feelings, they tried their feelings by their principles; and, consequently, judged the former were wrong whenever they clashed with the latter. Their feelings, consequently, became perverted, for being of a more compliant and yielding disposition than the stubborn pride of supposed intellectual rectitude, which is always dogmatic in proportion as it is ignorant, they yielded at length to the domination of principles, which were not originally founded in feeling and true sensibility; and by endeavouring to believe that what these principles inculcated was true, they conformed to them by degrees, and consequently became per-

verted. This tyranny, which was exercised over feeling, introduced the dark ages of scholastic and metaphysical abstractions. The first triumph over it, evinced itself in quaintness of thought, false wit, and catachrestical decorations; for thought must be quaint, wit must be false, and embellishments must be far-fetched, when we think by rule, before we consult our feelings, and draw our embellishments from those remote images, which unnatural associations present to the mind. We need never distrust our principles, if we are certain that they express the general feelings of mankind,—that is, that they are rules derived from observing how the generality of mankind are affected on certain occasions; but if we have not this certainty, we should always try them by our feelings, and see whether they agree. He who never tries his principles by his feelings, will soon have no feelings that are worth consulting. False biases and prepossessions will soon take possession of his heart; nor will he feel himself affected, like other men, by the same causes of pleasure and of pain. Such a man, in fact, has triumphed over his own nature, and completely subdued it. He becomes indurated to all the finer impulses of humanity: a settled melancholy broods over his mind; and if nature should sometimes have its course—if some strong and powerful impetus should break down all the

barriers which impale his feelings, and all the fetters which enchain his sympathies—should the entire natural man, enjoying for a moment the ardent and genial glow of natural delight, regain his lost dominion, and dispel the dark and visionary creation which had been conjured up around him; yet the demon of ignorance, or of superstition, would soon renew the enchantment, and long accustomed to distrust his own feelings, he would imagine they now only wished to betray him again: his

——" Heart, distrusting, asks if this be joy."

He, then, who does not respect and cultivate a profound acquaintance with his own feelings, will vainly hope to distinguish himself as a critic. This cultivation, this union of principles and of feelings, is the true foundation of criticism, but still more of original composition. The original writer aims only to please and instruct mankind; but to please others, he must not only feel pleased himself, but attend to the causes from which he is most generally apt to derive this pleasure. If he be inattentive to the principles on which he is himself pleased or displeased, he consequently judges of principles as a blind man judges of colours. He can talk of them as much as he pleases, though he has not the remotest idea of what they mean. But while we should thus cul-

tivate an acquaintance with our feelings, unless we also enrich our minds with principles, we shall vainly aspire to critical knowledge. True principles can never lead us into error, but none can be true that are not originally founded in the common feeling of mankind. We may be ignorant of principles, but we cannot possibly be ignorant of our feelings, if we only attend to them; and they are so happily contrived by the Author of nature, that they incline us to truth, when we are even unable to assign a cause; and they would always direct us right, if we could always see without principles, experience, or the habits of comparison, all the qualities in an object that are fitted to excite emotions in us when perceived. Principles do not possess this advantage when they are only few in number, for then they generally lead us astray. But when we become master of all the principles of beauty, in poetry, or any other art, we never find that they lead us to any conclusion to which our feelings are opposed. When principles are perfect, they always agree with our feelings; when imperfect, our feelings hardly ever agree with them. He who is but imperfectly acquainted with the principles of criticism is therefore always safer in trusting to his feelings than to his principles; but it is still certain that little reliance can be placed on his judgment in either case; for the feelings of

such a man must be very different from the feelings of him who has enriched his mind with the rules and principles of beauty, elegance, and correctness. The feelings of the latter are principles in themselves: the habit of judging correctly induces insensibly a habit of feeling correctly; so that the feelings and principles of a man of taste are so closely allied, that it is difficult to tell which is which. Feelings thus finely turned to an exquisite sense of the beauties of nature and of art, will not easily be led into a false perception of beauty. To judge by principles, when properly understood, is to judge by feeling: the only difference is, that when we judge by principles, we judge by the feelings of mankind at large; for a true principle of taste simply expresses how the generality of mankind would feel on a certain occasion. The true critic would therefore prefer this principle to any contrary feeling of his own, because he knows that the common feeling of mankind is the true standard of taste, and that nothing but intellectual anarchy would ensue, if every individual attempted to obtrude his own feelings on the world as a standard of elegance. Here then, alone, principles should take the lead of our feelings; but when the critic is called to decide upon any question of taste, though he must, in the first instance, be governed by such acknowledged prin-

ciples as are most applicable to the question; yet if it involve any relation or qualities whatever that are peculiar to itself, and which make it so far differ from all other questions on subjects of taste that can be decided by acknowledged principles, he must not be ultimately guided by principles themselves, but, adhering to them implicitly, so far as they apply to the subject before him, consult his feelings alone with regard to the circumstances in which they differ. It is by this application of our feelings to our principles, that we can alone form correct judgments; and without this union of principles and of feeling, we may display an extensive acquaintance with the technicalities of criticism and of art, but we need never aspire to that correct judgment and refined feeling, which raise the critic to the same rank with the original writer, and give him an equal claim to immortality.

CHAP. VII.

Miscellaneous Observations on the Proper Objects of Taste.

THE qualities that excite the emotion of sublimity in the mind, have been considered by most writers on the subject, as proper objects of taste; and, accordingly, they have extended its province to an acquaintance with all the qualities that enter into our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. To the sense of beauty and sublimity, some writers have added the sense of novelty, of imitation, of harmony, of ridicule, and of virtue. I have confined it to the sense of beauty alone, and in doing so, I have been determined by the following reflections. Imitation, harmony, ridicule, and virtue, are only different species of beauty, and must necessarily be treated of under that head. The sense of novelty is, I apprehend, a sense which we do not possess. We may form an idea of novelty, but we have no sense of it. When a new object is presented to us, it is the object itself that affects us, and not the abstract idea of novelty; for if we were moved only by

the novelty of the object, all new objects would affect us alike. This is never the case—every object affects us by its own distinct qualities, and therefore we experience a very different emotion when we first see a tiger or an elephant, from what we felt when we first gazed upon a dove or a butterfly. Our feelings are entirely engrossed by the appearance of the object itself, not by the reflection that we have never seen it before. This reflection may not occur to us at all, and therefore it does not *necessarily* enter into the sensation of the moment; whereas the sensation produced by the object itself, is irresistible, and always determined by its proper nature. The reflection that we never saw it before, is not a feeling or sensation, but an act of the understanding; but the impression made by the object is not an act, but a passion. It is a change produced in our feelings, not by any act of our own, but by the appearance of the object, so that, with regard to the impression, we are perfectly passive. A novel object, then, is pleasing, or disagreeable, on the same principle with objects with which we are long acquainted. The qualities that please in the one are the same that please in the other; and it is only these qualities that the connoisseur or critical judge takes into consideration, when he points out the beauty or ugliness of a novel object. The judgments of a

man of taste are infinitely less influenced by the mere novelty of an object, than the judgments of him who has no pretensions to it. To whatever degree, then, the mere novelty of an object may affect the man of feeling, it will never influence the judgments of a man of correct taste; and therefore taste and novelty cannot have the remotest alliance with each other.

Dr. Gerard, however, in his "Essay on Taste," considers novelty to be so important a branch of it, that he devotes the first section of his work to "the sense, or taste, of novelty." The very title of this section shews that he confounds, like most other writers, sense, or feeling, with taste; and that he considers novelty as something that has a positive and virtual existence of its own, independent of the subject that first suggests its abstract idea. "The mind," he says, in the commencement of his work, "receives pleasure or pain, not only from the impulse of external objects, but also from the consciousness of its own operations and dispositions. When these are produced by external objects, the pleasure, or the pain, which arises immediately from the exertions of the mind, is ascribed to those things which give occasion to them."

From this mode of opening his subject, it is obvious Dr. Gerard imagined, that there are some operations and dispositions of mind from which

we derive pleasure and pain, that have no alliance with the influence of external objects. Whether there be abstract operations of mind unconnected with the influence of external objects, is a question on which I do not wish to offer here any opinion; not only because the opinion I entertain on the subject would require more argument and discussion than I would wish to engage in, at present, but also because it would lead me into speculations that do not properly belong to the present subject. I feel confident, however, that there are no operations of the mind, from which we derive pleasure or pain, but what can be ultimately traced to the impressions of external being, either sensible or intellectual; for with regard to our minds the one is as external as the other. Dr. Gerard is, therefore, mistaken in saying, "when these pleasures and pains are produced by external objects;" because they are never felt when there are no external objects to produce them. They may be felt, it is true, where there is no external object present to the mind; but they can always be traced to their immediate or remote influence. Novelty, therefore, abstracted from the object that is novel, is so far from giving pleasure or pain, that we cannot even form an abstract idea of novelty without it. The pleasures of novelty he endeavours to elucidate, by observing, that "plainness and perspicuity be-

come displeasing in an author when they are carried to excess, and leave no room for exercising the reader's thought; and though great obscurity disgusts us, yet we are highly gratified by delicacy of sentiment, which always includes some degree of it, occasions a suspense of thought, and leaves the full meaning to be guessed at, and comprehended only on attention." This idea of novelty is rather obscure; for what novelty can there be in remaining ignorant of an author's meaning? In this case, surely, we are only left in the same state of information in which we were placed before we perused him. If we cannot perceive what he means, we are just as wise as we were before; unless we chance to adopt some false opinions of our own in attempting to discover his meaning; but if this be novelty, it is a novelty of our own creation. A writer must, therefore, make himself understood before he suggests the idea of novelty; for if he informs us of any thing with which we were before unacquainted, and we understand what this thing is, we are then certainly in possession of a new idea. But what is the merit of an affected obscurity? It may serve, indeed, as a cloak for ignorance; but it can neither enlighten nor instruct. If a certain degree of obscurity be characteristic of good taste, I doubt whether it is possible to determine the exact degree to which this obscurity may be

carried. A writer pregnant with thought and sentiment, will, no doubt, suggest to reflecting minds many trains of ideas, some of which must necessarily be obscure, at least such of them as involve general conceptions; for such conceptions, when they first suggest themselves to the mind, must be more or less obscure, till they are resolved into the simple ideas of which they are composed. But we must not attribute this obscurity to the writer, who has suggested this train of reflections; for if he has expressed his own sentiments with clearness and precision, all remaining obscurity is created by ourselves, and not by him. But if the obscurity consist in the difficulty of discovering his meaning, so far from considering it a proof of his taste, we should deem it either a proof of his affectation, or of a confusion of ideas in his own mind; and as taste is conversant in distinguishing what is more from what is less excellent, and as its delight arises from perceiving that every thing is as it ought to be, it is contrary to all our ideas of taste, and even to common sense, to conclude, that it can delight in confusion and obscurity; that is, in things not as they ought to be. We must, then, carefully distinguish between the author whose meaning is grasped with difficulty, and him who writes with accuracy and perspicuity, though he should frequently direct the attention of his reader to the

copious literary sources from which he derives his information, without waiting to exhaust them. He may render it obvious, that there are such sources; he may even incline us to suspect that he is intimately acquainted with all the intellectual treasures which they contain; he may only select from them what is just sufficient for his immediate wants, or to elucidate the subject of which he treats; he may even content himself with removing a part of the veil that conceals them from us, and thus excite our curiosity to explore them ourselves: but he may still write with the utmost nicety, purity, and perspicuity of expression. So far as he chooses to unfold his own ideas, he may render them as clear as daylight, though he still makes us wish to become also acquainted with what he has concealed. But obscurity regards only what is expressed; we cannot apply the term to such ideas as a writer has thought proper not to communicate to us; for whether such ideas be clear or obscure in his own mind we cannot tell, and with regard to us they are neither one nor the other: they are virtual nonentities; and to apply clear, obscure, or any other term to them, is to embody privations, and "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name:" a license granted indeed to the poet, but not to the philosopher, who seeks to account for the causes, or explain the principles of things.

The trains of reflections that are suggested by a writer who draws his arguments and elucidations from an extensive circle of science, are clear or obscure, according to the depth or shallowness of the mind to which they present themselves; or according to the extent of his acquired knowledge. But in all cases where any subject of thought appears obscure, whether it be a real or a visionary object summoned into an ideal existence by ourselves, the obscurity must be always in the mind, and not in the subject which it contemplates. A visionary object cannot be obscure, because it has no existence. A thing must exist before obscurity, or any quality, can be attributed to it. The obscurity, then, is in the mind which imagined it saw something where there was nothing to be seen. The obscurity is equally in the mind if the subject of contemplation be a real object of human knowledge. Newton saw as clearly that the square of the side subtending a right angle was equal to the squares of both the sides containing it, as he did that two right lines cannot inclose a space; but how many understand the axiom as clearly as Newton, to whom the theorem is perfectly obscure! If this obscurity, however, was in the theorem itself, and not in the mind, it would appear more obscure to Newton himself than the axiom would, or otherwise it would not appear to him as it really was,

and he would have a mistaken view of it. All things, then, are equally clear, though all minds are not equally qualified to perceive the light of evidence by which they are surrounded; and accordingly we find, that as men extend their knowledge, the most difficult truth, when it is once comprehended, is as clear to them as the simplest; but antecedent to perception, the simplest truth is as obscure and difficult as the most abstruse in the whole circle of science. Alfieri, on whom the Italians look as the best of their dramatic writers, had so little of a mathematical mind, that he tells us, it cost him several years before he could comprehend the fourth proposition in the first book of Euclid, which, no doubt, arose from its being nearly self-evident.

But whatever obscurity arises from any train of reflections suggested by a writer, we can judge of his obscurity, not by what he suggests, but by what he literally expresses. I am aware, however, that a writer may appear obscure to a great class of readers, though a single sentence cannot be pointed out in the whole of his works, that is not clearly and intelligibly expressed. This arises, not from any obscurity either in the mind or in the writings of the author, but from his omitting several things necessary to render the entire subject perfectly understood, but with which he supposes his reader already acquainted. If the love

of brevity should lead a writer into this error, his readers, at least, cannot accuse him of having misled them; for though he has not given them a perfect knowledge of the subject in which he engaged, yet so far as he has taught them, their knowledge is certain; and if they wish to know more, they can have recourse to other sources of information. It generally happens, however, that he who has a clear perception of his subject, and who writes with perspicuity and accuracy, has also that circumspective eye which looks round and takes in every thing materially connected with it. The error of which writers are chiefly accused, is that of saying too much, rather than that of leaving any thing unsaid; and this is, perhaps, more characteristic of English than of French writers: at least they tell us we never know when to have done. But I doubt whether we have not gained in certainty what we have lost in variety of knowledge, by this circumstantial and minute investigation of things; and I also doubt whether we can place a thing in too many different lights, provided we never place it twice exactly in the same light. It is possible to write much, and to display a mind overflowing with the abundance of its intellectual acquirements, and after all leave the reader in a state of vague uncertainty. A writer who communicates knowledge through the medium of general ideas, of un-

substantiated assumptions, and conclusions deduced from mere popular opinion or popular prejudices, and who abounds in hints and allusions to learned authorities, may impart but little of real knowledge, or what is equivalent, little that the reader can call completely his own. The writer who instructs mankind, is he who walks step by step by the side of his reader, and therefore explains himself as he proceeds. A writer, however highly he may be respected by the public, should never flatter himself with an opinion, that his readers will give credence to every thing he asserts on his own individual authority; for the greater part of readers have self-love enough to set as high a value on their own opinions, as they do on those of the most eminent writer, whenever they differ with him; and in most cases I believe they are right. So long as a writer adheres to truth, he will find, few of his readers willing to dispute his doctrine; and when his readers begin to suspect the orthodoxy of his opinions, it will generally be found, that either his meaning is obscure, or his doctrine not perfectly correct. The generality of readers are not so incapable of comprehending the meaning of an author, when properly expressed, and of perceiving the truth of his doctrine, and the beauties of his language, as some are apt to imagine, and they seldom doubt the excellence of either with-

out cause. Literary excellence, according to Boileau, consists in presenting no thought to the reader but what is true, and no expression but what is just. But he does not deem these thoughts to be such as are placed beyond the reach of general understandings: on the contrary, he considers all true thoughts to be what the generality of mankind can understand with ease; and he attributes the success of his own writings, to his having always conformed his sentiments and his language to the natural perceptions of the great mass of readers, not to the systematized notions of the learned few. "Un ouvrage a beau etre approuvé," he says, "d'un petit nombre de connoisseurs: si il n'est plein d'un certain agrement, et d'un certain sel propre à piquer le goût général des hommes, il ne passera jamais pour un bon ouvrage, et il faudra, à la fin, que les connoisseurs euxmêmes avouent, qu'ils se sont trompés en lui donnant leur approbation." When a reader, therefore, finds any difficulty in comprehending the sense of an author, or begins to doubt the correctness of his opinions, there is much reason to suspect that his doubts are well-founded. So great is the force of truth, that a writer who never deviates from it, and who expresses his sentiments clearly and distinctly, who makes every idea stand by itself, and clearly distinguishes between it and every other with which it is associated,

will force his reader to believe him whether he will or will not; and so far from doubting what he asserts, he is inclined to think, that he tells him nothing but what is clear and obvious to all mankind. Hence it is, that a writer who divests his subject of all mystery, and renders it so palpably evident, that it is impossible for any person to mistake it but the mere dunce, loses a great portion of that credit which he would acquire with the generality of mankind, had he involved his sentiments and expressions in the unintelligibility or ambiguity of metaphysical abstractions. "I am fully aware," says Professor Stuart, "that, whoever, in treating of the human mind, aims to be understood, must lay his account with forfeiting, in the opinion of a very large proportion of readers, all pretensions to depth, to subtilty, or to invention. The acquisition of a new nomenclature, is, in itself, no inconsiderable reward to the industry of those who study only from motives of literary vanity; and if D'Alembert's idea of this branch of science be just, the wider an author deviates from truth, the more likely are his conclusions to assume the appearance of discoveries. I may add, that it is chiefly in those discussions which possess the best claim to originality, where he may expect to be told by the multitude, that they have learned from him nothing but what they knew before."

With these sentiments I profess the most unqualified concurrence, believing, as I do, that the writer who has a clear and luminous view of his subject, and who presents it to his readers in the same marked and distinct character that it appears to himself, will appear to possess less depth and subtilty, than he who gives them only a glimmering view of every object. When a writer presents to us only part of an object, we imagine he was as well acquainted with the part which he has concealed, as the part which he has disclosed; and we give him greater credit for that supposed knowledge which he has not thought proper to communicate, and of which, perhaps, he is as ignorant as we are ourselves, than we do for the small glimmering light which he has condescended to afford us. But if he remove the entire veil, and place the object in open day, so that we are enabled to see it as clearly as himself, we have nothing farther to expect from him. We become now as good judges of the matter as he is himself, and we refuse to give him credit for a knowledge that appears so simple and obvious. A good writer, however, has generally too much pride to be vain: and he will cheerfully forego the reputation that results from an affected obscurity, that he may enjoy the purer satisfaction of adding to the general knowledge of mankind, by making himself clearly understood.

No good writer, therefore, was ever known to study obscurity of expression. No art, it is true, can teach those who do not think clearly to express themselves with perspicuity; for as the rules of fine writing can only teach us how to express our thoughts with the greatest propriety and fidelity, it requires no argument to shew, that where the thought is obscure, the expression must be equally so, however correct a copy it may be of the original. No writer can render his expression clearer than his thoughts, though he may easily render them more obscure; for the most experienced writer will sometimes have considerable difficulty in expressing a thought as clearly as it exists in his mind; to express it more clearly, however, is an art that can never be acquired.

But whether novelty pleases us by its own abstract influence, or not, it is certain that it is not in itself an object of taste, because the emotion which it excites, may as well be any other emotion, as an emotion connected with taste. Novel objects excite all kinds of emotions, as joy, hope, fear, distrust, aversion, grief, despair, &c.; but all these emotions are not emotions of taste; and therefore, novelty is not more allied to this emotion, than it is to all the other emotions of the soul. Novelty, however, considered as variety, and governed by certain laws, is a princi-

pal quality of beauty, and cannot, even in this sense, be made a distinct object of taste.

Neither is sublimity a proper object of taste, but so far as it conveys an idea of beauty, as will more fully appear in my treatise on that subject. It has been considered so, merely from not distinguishing with sufficient accuracy the real difference between it and beauty, or rather from not ascertaining the distinct and proper nature of each. This, at least, is my opinion; but the reasons on which this opinion is founded, do not properly belong to my present subject. In the mean time, to shew that I am not singular in it, I quote the following passage from D'Alembert, in which the same doctrine is strictly maintained.

"There are certain charms," he says, "of a sublime and striking kind, which equally affect all observers, and of which, consequently, all the various orders of mankind, in all ages and nations of the world, are competent judges. But there is also another species of beauty which only affects those minds that are possessed of a certain delicacy of feeling, and which remains imperceptible to vulgar spirits. The beauties which belong to this class, are beauties only of a second order; because objects which excite the idea of grandeur, surpass those which affect us only by their gracefulness and elegance. The charms, however,

of this second class of objects, are those which it requires the most sagacity to discern, and the greatest delicacy to feel truly; and, accordingly, they abound most in those nations where social intercourse has contributed to the perfection of the arts, and multiplied the sources of pleasure and enjoyment. It is, then, in this class of beauty, which is adapted to the contemplation of the discerning few, that we are properly to look for the objects of taste."

Beauty, then, seems to be the sole and only proper object of taste; and this taste, if the view which I have taken of it, in the first part of this work be correct, entirely consists in the discrimination of those qualities which constitute beauty, not in that delightful feeling which is generally, though not universally, imparted by them. I know of no writer, however, on the subject of taste, who has not been led into error by identifying feeling with taste, either in his definition of it, or in his discussing the subject under that impression. Mr. Dugald Stewart, who is certainly the most correct metaphysical writer of the age, has commenced his "Essay on Taste" by endeavouring to shew, that taste is not a simple, original faculty; and quotes the authority of Mr. Burke, Sir J. Reynolds, Dr. Gerard, and Mr. Alison, in support of his opinion; yet, not only Mr. Stewart himself, but these very writers

have treated the subject of taste under a clear impression, that it was an original faculty, as might be proved from many parts of their respective works on that subject. "I must not conclude this part of my subject," says Mr. Stewart, "without doing justice to some authors who appear to have entertained perfectly just and correct ideas, concerning the nature of taste, as an *acquired principle*, although none of them, as far as I know, has at all examined the process by which it is generated."* The very circumstance of their not examining this process, proves they treated it as an original faculty. Taste, however, is strictly an art, namely, an art which makes us acquainted with the qualities that constitute beauty, in whatever these qualities consist. A person may acquire such a knowledge of this art, and of its principles, as to pass for a man of taste, without a particle of that original delicacy of feeling which enables us to attain the art in its highest perfection. Though a man possesses no feelings himself but what are gross and inflexible, there is still nothing to prevent him from learning what pleases others; and the whole of taste is comprised in this knowledge. He differs then from the man of original sensibility, only in being incapable of judging of forms, or subjects, the

* Essay on Taste, p. 480, third edition.

the beauty of which cannot be determined by any pattern or model of beauty with which he is already acquainted. Here the man of original feeling has the advantage over him, provided he has studied the art as well as himself. If not, so far from acquiring taste through the mere delicacy of his feelings, he will always remain a novice in it, and can never approach the skilful and experienced *connoisseur*, to whom nature has denied all original delicacy of feeling. Such a connoisseur, however, can never become a refined judge of beauty; but he is nevertheless a man of taste. He who has not a genius for painting, will never become eminent in his profession; but he is nevertheless a painter, as well as Raphael or Angelo, if he has made himself acquainted with all the principles of the art, and united practice with theory. If his not attaining to the highest excellence in the art, annuls his claim to the title of an artist, neither Rubens nor Bernini were artists; nor indeed, strictly speaking, the most eminent of all the painters of antiquity. Perfection has been attained by none of them. Every man then is a painter, who has studied the theory and practice of that art, even though he had been originally destitute of that genius which alone could lead him to excellence; and every man is a connoisseur or man of taste, who by practice, experience, comparison and instruction, has become

acquainted with those qualities that are generally found pleasing or displeasing to mankind. Feeling, then, does not constitute taste, because taste requires experience, comparison, and many other acquirements, which have no necessary connexion with feeling. But he who possesses all these acquirements, possesses those elements of discrimination in which taste consists; while he who wants them can never discriminate through the medium of feeling alone.

Taste, then, is strictly an art; and though neither Mr. Stewart, nor the writers whom he quotes, have gone so far as to call it an art, they have admitted it to be, what is virtually equivalent,—an *acquired principle.* It is strange, then, that they should still proceed in their discussion, as if it were a simple, original principle in our nature. Mr. Stewart, after setting out with the former position, and completing his observations on the subject, tells us how he has treated it in the following remarkable words: "In what I have hitherto said with respect to taste, I have considered it chiefly as *the native growth of the individual mind to which it belongs;* endeavouring to trace it to its first principles, or seeds, in our intellectual frame." Surely every one who gives a moment's consideration to the subject must know, that, if taste be "the native growth of the individual mind," it cannot be traced to any first

principles, as it is a first principle in itself. Whatever is the native growth of the mind is planted in it by nature, and is, in itself, a first principle, as it can only be traced to nature, in which all first principles resolve themselves. But if taste can be traced to other principles, it is the result of these principles, and not the native growth of the mind. The science of music can be traced to first principles, and a knowledge of it depends on an acquaintance with these principles. Hence it is not the native growth of the mind, and accordingly there is considerable difficulty in becoming acquainted with it, even through the medium of culture and experience. Taste also can be traced to first principles, and this proves it not the native growth of the mind, as Mr. Stewart has considered it, in direct opposition to the theory on which he set out; namely, that it was an *acquired principle*. Calling it an acquired principle, however, is another error resulting from the habit of confounding taste with feeling, and therefore looking upon it as a distinct individual quality of the mind. Taste, however, instead of being an acquired principle, is a system, or rather a collection, of acquired principles, by which we are guided in judging of the beauties of nature and of art. When Mr. Stewart set about tracing the first principles, or seeds, of taste, it is obvious he ought to have gone to feeling at once, as all

the principles of taste must be ultimately traced to it. But, though all the principles of taste may be traced to feeling, yet feeling is not taste; for feeling can be traced to no principle but nature. Feeling may be called taste with as much propriety as hands and feet may be called swimming, or fingers and a violin may be called music. Without hands and feet we could never learn the art of swimming; but we may have both hands and feet, and yet be drowned from our ignorance of the art. So also without feeling, mankind could not originally have become acquainted with the principles of taste; but we may, notwithstanding, possess feeling and remain for ever ignorant of them. "In cases, however," continues Mr. Stewart, "where nature has not been so liberal as to render the formation of this power (taste) possible, merely from the mind's own internal resources, much may be done by judicious culture in early life." Here, still, it is obvious, that he confounds taste with feeling; for if he considered it as that collection of acquired principles, without which no man ever possessed taste, so far from saying that much may be done by judicious culture, he would acknowledge, at once, that scarcely any thing can be done without it: besides, to acknowledge cases in which nature alone can do the business, is to acknowledge, that taste does not necessarily require culture or experience,

though it may receive some assistance from it, where nature has not originally completed her work. I apprehend, however, that a man of taste was never produced by nature alone; and that to be a judge of poetry, music, painting, architecture, sculpture, eloquence, and composition in all its various departments, gardening, and the drama, so far from being the work of nature, requires not only the exercise of all our individual powers, but the assistance and experience of all those who have confined their attention solely to one or other of these arts. If the rules of judging, as is universally allowed, should always be taken from the precepts, or canons, of the arts themselves, how is a man who derives all his principles of judgment from his "own internal resources," to become acquainted with those rules, or canons, by which the professors of the arts are invariably guided?

Having already enlarged upon this subject, I make these additional observations, merely to convince my reader of the necessity of carefully distinguishing between taste and feeling. It is not sufficient that he consider them different, but that he carries this consideration always along with him: for it is to a neglect of it, that all the writers on the subject have been bewildered in treating of it. They did not want talents to do it every justice; but having their minds always

impressed with one erroneous sentiment, it rendered it absolutely impossible for them to treat it as they ought. Had they considered taste to be as much an art as criticism, they would have treated it differently. Criticism, however, differs from taste only in being the art of perceiving what is agreeable to reason and our feelings; whereas taste confines itself to the art of discriminating what is pleasing to our feelings alone. In many cases, therefore, taste and criticism are the same.

Dr. Gerard places sensibility, refinement, and correctness equally among the qualities of taste. "Refinement, or elegance," he says, "which, as well as sensibility, is included in the idea of *delicacy*, is another quality requisite for forming a perfect taste." This is a mistake. Sensibility, so far from being a mere quality of taste, as Dr. Gerard considers it, and so far from holding the same rank with refinement and correctness, is the very foundation of taste: it is the *substratum* on which all the principles of taste are founded, and to which they must be ultimately referred. In making sensibility a quality of taste, Dr. Gerard evidently makes it a quality of itself; for he obviously confounds sensibility with taste in his treatment of the subject, though he professes to consider them different. He divides the first part of his work into the "sense, or taste, of novelty;

the sense, or taste, of sublimity; the sense, or taste, of beauty; the sense, or taste, of imitation; the sense, or taste, of harmony; the sense, or taste, of oddity and ridicule; and the sense, or taste, of virtue." Here, then, we have seven different kinds of taste; and all these tastes are so many senses: a confusion of ideas which would easily have been avoided if taste were considered, as I have considered it, not a sense, but a discriminating perception of certain qualities, that excite certain emotions in the mind. To confound taste with sense, is obviously to confound it with feeling or sensibility; and to call sensibility afterwards a quality of taste, is, in other words, to call sensibility a quality of sensibility.

In distinguishing refinement, correctness, and sensibility from each other, Dr. Gerard seems to have been equally perplexed in his ideas. "*Sensibility*," he says, "disposes us to be strongly affected with whatever beauties, or faults, we perceive. *Refinement* makes us capable of discovering both, even when they are not obvious. Correctness must be superadded, that we may not be imposed upon by false appearances; that we may neither approve shining faults, nor condemn modest virtues; but be able to assign to every quality its due proportion of merit or demerit." Here are distinctions without any distinction. The obscurity and incomprehensibility of this

passage places what I have already observed, relative to clear and obscure writers, in a more obvious point of view. Had Dr. Gerard clearly distinguished between refinement and correctness, his reader would have no difficulty in understanding him. He would perceive, as clearly as the Doctor, wherein they differed and wherein they agreed. He would not, therefore, imagine, that any extraordinary effort of mind was necessary to discover agreements and disagreements that were so distinctly manifest. Had Dr. Gerard, then, clearly distinguished between refinement and correctness of taste, he would have come in for a much less portion of merit with superficial readers, than they may be now willing to grant him, for having involved the distinction between them in perfect obscurity. Neither the enlightened nor the superficial reader can tell wherein correctness differs from refinement, according to the Doctor's manner of distinguishing them. The enlightened reader, however, will ascribe this to the Doctor's obscurity of ideas, and not to his own, aware that, if a clear distinction had been made, he would have understood it. The superficial reader, on the contrary, either takes it for granted, that he does understand it, or, if he should stop for a moment to examine whether he does or not, and discover that he has not a clear view of it, he does not attribute the

fault to the Doctor, but to himself, and therefore, the less he understands him, the more he admires him, because he considers a writer must be profound whom he cannot understand.

That the doctor's distinction between refinement and correctness is obscure—that, in fact, his distinction is no distinction—will appear manifest, if we consider it for a moment. "Refinement," we are told, "makes us capable of discovering both faults and beauties, even when they are not obvious." Let us inquire what more than this is effected by correctness; and we cannot trace even a shadow of difference but what consists in words. "Correctness must be superadded," it is said, "that we may not be imposed upon by false appearances." If refinement make us capable of discovering both faults and beauties, *even when they are not obvious*, how can we possibly be imposed upon by false appearances? How can we approve faults, or condemn beauties, after refinement points them out to us, even when they are not obvious? If Dr. Gerard meant, that correctness was still more expert at finding them out than refinement, it follows that refinement and correctness, so far from being different qualities of taste, are only different degrees of the same quality; that is, that refinement is only a certain degree of correctness. Unless we adopt this supposition, the distinction between them is perfectly unintelligible; and if we do adopt it, it is

equally certain that the Doctor had no clear ideas on the subject, as he considers refinement and correctness as different qualities, and treats of them under different heads.

It often happens, however, that we can perceive the errors of another without being able to correct them; but even when this is the case, it is wiser to acknowledge our ignorance, than remain ignorant of it, and pretend to know where we know nothing. The knowledge of a disease is half its cure; and unless we first discover our ignorance, we can never hope to surmount it. He, therefore, who detects the errors of an author without being able to correct them, has, notwithstanding, an obvious advantage over him who imagines he understands an author who does not understand himself. The distinction between refinement and correctness, however, appears to me easily understood when properly explained; but it should not be inferred from this that whatever is easily understood is also easily explained. If, for instance, each of my readers were to explain in what refinement differs from correctness of taste, I doubt whether many of them would not feel some difficulty in doing so satisfactorily, though I believe most of them would imagine, on a superficial view of the question, that they could explain it with ease. When, however, it is clearly explained, they cannot have a moment's difficulty in understanding it. At least,

I am of this opinion, and the reader will probably coincide with me when he reads the following explanation.

If two observers view the same object, suppose a painting or a statue, one of them will only notice such qualities or appearances as are striking and obvious, while the other perceives innumerable other qualities, appearances, and evidences of design, which are totally concealed from the latter. If the qualities and appearances which affect the former, produce in him such emotions as they would produce in the generality of mankind, his feelings are correct; but until he can view and feel affected by those more latent and less obvious qualities which affect the latter, he can have no refined feelings. Refined feelings are such as are excited by such sensible or intellectual qualities, as are perceived only by men of exquisite and discriminating perceptions, and the feelings of such men are both refined and correct at the same moment; but correct feelings do not express the perception of any certain qualities in an object; they merely indicate that they are such feelings, as the perceived qualities were fitted to produce. The feelings which are excited by the perception of only two qualities in an object are correct, if they be such as these two qualities would have produced in the generality of mankind; but the man of refined feelings would, perhaps, pass over these qualities

before they had time to produce any emotion whatever, and proceed to the contemplation of such latent qualities, as were concealed from the perception of grosser intellects. It is obvious, therefore, that refined feelings must be always correct, though correct feelings may not be always refined; and it is equally obvious, that correctness need not be "superadded" to refinement, to prevent us from "approving faults, or condemning virtues" (beauties); for, instead of superadding correctness to refinement, it is refinement that ought to be superadded to correctness. No feeling can be refined that is not correct; but many feelings may be correct that are not refined, and they are always so when they are excited by the grosser and more striking qualities of an object. A man of the most exquisite taste will feel an emotion of disgust when he perceives a loathsome object, but this emotion, though correct, is not refined; and if a butcher feel the same emotion, it is as correct as that of the man of taste, because the emotion in both is such as the object is fitted to produce. If, on the contrary, the callousness of the butcher's feelings subdue this emotion, if he has so imbruted his nature as to view it with perfect satisfaction, his feelings cease to be correct; though, had they even been so, they could not be refined, because there was nothing in the object calculated to excite a refined emotion.

This explanation will, I apprehend, render the distinction between refined and correct feelings obviously manifest; every reader can perceive it as clearly as I do, though I am certain, at the same time, that many pages might be written on the subject, apparently fraught with learning and erudition, and yet leave the reader as ignorant of the real difference between refinement and correctness, as if he had not read a word on the subject. Metaphysical subjects are not, therefore, so abstruse, as they are generally supposed to be. All that is marked with the characters of certainty in them is obvious to all men of ordinary apprehensions, if clearly explained; and all that is not so marked, is vague and uncertain, and will produce as little conviction in the most profound philosopher, as in the most superficial and uninformed mind. If, then, metaphysical truths appear abstruse, it is only because metaphysical writers render them so: they are certainly abstruse before they are discovered; but when once discovered. and properly explained, they are easily understood. If a metaphysical writer, therefore, be abstruse, it is either because he does not clearly understand what he wishes to explain, or because he does not explain it in a clear, perspicuous, and luminous manner. Simplicity is the chief object which writers on taste and metaphysical subjects in general should have constantly in view; for whatever is clearly per-

ceived, and simply expressed, will be always easily understood.

It is obvious that an Essay on Taste, if treated in its fullest extent, would include treatises on painting, poetry, composition, &c.; but this was not the intention with which I engaged in the subject. I merely wished to explain its distinct and proper nature. The application of its principles to all the fine arts will, however, form some part of my Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful. In this work, however, my principal object will be to ascertain and develope in what Beauty and Sublimity properly consist, apprehending, as I do, that much greater errors have been adopted on these subjects, particularly that of beauty, than on the subject of taste itself. I shall, however, have occasion to borrow numerous examples from the fine arts, in support of the theory which I intend to adopt, on the subject of beauty; in all of which one common principle, or quality, will be found to prevail—and that a principle, different from any which has as yet been adopted on this interesting subject.

Before I conclude, it may be necessary to observe, that many writers on the subject of taste confound it with that particular genius, which individuals have for certain arts. This genius is only that particular frame of mind which enables a person to arrive at great excellence in one individual art, while he is totally disqualified to

excel in another. It ought, however, to be recollected, that taste is conversant only in the discrimination of beauties produced by others. To produce beauties is the province of a man of genius: to judge of them when produced, is that of a man of taste. The latter, therefore, is supposed to be a judge of all the fine arts; but the man of genius is generally limited to the production of beauties only in a few. He is not, therefore, considered as a judge of beauty, but as the creator of it; and as it is much more difficult to produce what is beautiful, than to judge of it when produced, it seldom happens that a man of genius succeeds when he seeks to distinguish himself in several arts at the same time; for, as Pope observes:—

> "One science only will one genius fit,
> So vast is art, so narrow human wit."

The man of taste must, therefore, consider himself as a mere judge of beauty; but he must always look up to the man of genius, as the creator of that beauty which is the subject of his admiration.

FINIS.

Printed by W. CATLINE, Bedford Place, Rotherhithe.

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